tower, the “tenured radical” phenomenon. The authorities both within academia and outside it don’t worry much about poststructuralists disrupting the status quo. In fact, an ironclad status quo has developed within poststructuralism. Ironically, poststructuralism is ruled by the works of mostly dead authors. The relatively few writings and ideas that constitute the poststructuralist canon are continuously recirculated inside a closed hermeneutical system.

The causes of this situation are not difficult to locate. Once the “disturbances” of the 1960s were snuffed out, many defeated radicals took refuge in academia, where they won in theory what was not accomplished in the streets. Addressing other poststructuralists and their students, poststructuralist writing grew complex and arcane, clearing a bigger and bigger space between the movement and the larger public. Even as the range of subjects studied expanded— including all aspects of popular culture—direct contact with the people decreased. Upon graduation, most students left poststructuralism behind. The few who continued to hold the torch became young professors. What had started as an effort to change society ended as an academic “tradition” dependent on the aforementioned canon of anti-canonical authors.

Neither the corporations, the government, nor the university officials messed with what was happening. Why bother? Unlike the disruptions of the 1960s, the new radicals kept their activities confined to “discourse” — writings, seminars, petitions, art works, well-regulated protests, and so on. These were all cultural products that made the universities appear “liberal” and open to the widest diversity of opinion. An increasingly totalizing global system could easily tolerate or even exploit in displaying the products of this liberalism. In fact, the more liberal the academic system was, the better it could control any radical impulses that might arise. At the level of governance, power was increasingly centralized in deans, presidents, and boards of trustees. The universities — public as well as private — corporatized bigtime in management style. The whole relation to “campus radicals” took on a quality of play — performative play. Absorbed into academia with its own strict rules of tenure, promotion, and administrative control, the revolution in thinking and society envisioned by the poststructuralists was largely reduced to and transformed into game playing.

Yet, wonder how much of the poststructuralist program has been accomplished. Isn’t there much more acceptance of diversity in European and North American cultures? Haven’t women, people of color, and Jews gotten further in these societies than ever before? Aren’t unpopular opinions heard more often? Haven’t school curriculums been thoroughly revised and expanded? What about the street demonstrations against the World Trade Organization? Or AIDS walks and the many other manifestations of a new social cohesion? Community-based performance gives voice to those who were not previously heard. Much of this can be credited to the long-term impact of poststructuralism. But be careful about confusing “tolerance” and “good management” with actual change. In the United States, at least, the diversity of behavior and opinion has not yet been tested against a serious economic recession or depression. Not to mention a large-scale war. It’s easy to be “generous” when times are good. It takes hard times to bring out the need for scapegoats. Time will tell.

Constructions of Gender

If history is an open project, and social reality the interplay of conflicting performs, how does this affect circumstances thought to be fixed biologically or by unshakable traditions, gender and race, for example? Is a person “woman” or “man,” “of color” or “white” because genetics says so or because of social arrangements? This is not a question of how people are treated or how much power they have. A revolution, or other engine of change, could result in women or people of color taking power without shaking the supposedly inherent differences between the sexes and the races. The “performativity” includes but also seeks beyond changes wrought by social action. The performativity inquiry asks, what constitutes individual identity and social reality; are these constructed or given; and if constructed, out of what? The questions are begged, of course: once one deems gender and race (plus all other social realities) “performative,” the answer is that these consist not of naturally determined operations but of something built and enforced by means of “performance” in the sense I used to describe that word in chapter 2. Even “nature” is not natural, or prior, but a humanly constructed concept designed (consciously or unconsciously) to accomplish human ends. This argument could be, and has been, applied to many areas of human activity. Here I will explore it as it pertains to gender and race.

Judith Butler develops the assertion of French existential writer Simone de Beauvoir (1908–86) that “One is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman” (see Butler box). That is, one’s biological sex (“female” or “male”) is raw material to be shaped through practice into the socially constructed performance that is gender (“woman” or “man”). Of course, these binaries are much too simple, but for the moment let us stick with them. Each individual from an early age learns
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to perform gender-specific vocal inflections, facial displays, gestures, walks, and erotic behavior as well as how to select, modify, and use scents, body shapes and adornments, clothing, and all other gender markings of a given society. These differ widely from period to period and culture to culture – indicating strongly that gender is constructed (see Acting the part of a woman box). To perform these "successfully" give a person a secure place within a given social world. To refuse to perform one's assigned gender is to rebel against . . . "nature."


Judith Butler

Gender is Performative

[. . . The body is a historical situation, as Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical situation. [. . .]

The act that gender is, the act that embodied agents are inasmuch as they dramatically and actively embody and, indeed, wear certain cultural significations, is clearly not one's act alone. Surely, there are nuanced and individual ways of doing one's gender, but that one does it, and that one does it in accord with certain sanctions and prescriptions, is clearly not a fully individual matter. [. . .] The 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. [. . .]

Gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed. [. . .] If gender attributes [. . .] are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. The distinction between expression and performativeness is quite crucial, for if gender attributes and acts, the various ways a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed. [. . .]

Gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed.


Acting the Part of a Woman

1860, Anonymous

Some ladies walk so as to turn up their dresses behind, and I have seen a well-dressed woman made to look very awkward by elevating her shoulders slightly and pushing her elbows too far behind her. Some hold their hands up to the waist, and press their arms against themselves as tightly as if they were glued there. Others swing them backward and forward as a businessman walking along the street. Too short steps detract from dignity very much, forming a mincing pace; too long steps are masculine.

1860, Complete Rules of Etiquette and Usages of Society, 3–4

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2001, Cara Birnbaum in Cosmopolitan

How do you work everything from tone of voice to body language to dazzle anyone instantly—from a hot stud to a cold-aside job interviewer? [...] It's crucial that your nonverbal cues, including gestures and posture, work overtime to put you in the best possible light. [...] To score some guy candy, subtly tilt your head and pivot your body whenever he does. If he pauses to loosen his tie, stop for a second to moisten your lips. It's all about showing him you're enchanted enough to be tracking his every move. [...] Start by adjusting your voice so that it matches his energy level. If his tones are enthusiastic, enthuse back. If he sounds mellow, you should too. It will only take a few minutes for a man to make up his mind that you're just like him. Once you've established that, you can be yourself.


As Butler points out, there are "nuanced" and "individual ways" of playing one's gender, but whatever these are, a person performs her or his gender in accordance with already inscribed performative. Butler very specifically compares gender roles to rehearsed theatrical performances that follow known scripts which survive the particular actors of the moment. In this Butler is applying the "all the world's a stage" metaphor enunciated by Shakespeare and explored in our own time by Erving Goffman and his many followers. Where Butler makes her own contribution is in her application of notions drawn from poststructuralism's theory of performatives. Butler argues that gender as performed in contemporary Western societies enacts a normative heterosexuality that is a major tool for enforcing a patriarchal, phallocentric social order (see Butler box 2). Thus Butler politicizes non-heterosexual (queer, gay, lesbian, drag, etc.) sexuality and positions these behaviors in opposition to the hegemonic male-dominated/defined social order. In other words, to become gay is to enact a radical politics along the order of "the personal is the political."

Judith Butler

Compulsory Heterosexuality

To guarantee the reproduction of a given culture, various requirements, well established in the anthropological literature of kinship, have instated sexual reproduction within the confines of a heterosexually-based system of marriage which requires the reproduction of human beings in certain gendered modes which, in effect, guarantee the eventual reproduction of that kinship system. As Foucault and others have pointed out, the association of a natural sex with a discrete gender and with an ostensibly natural "attraction" to the opposing sex/gender is an unnatural conjunction of cultural constructs in the service of reproductive interests. Feminist cultural anthropology and kinship studies have shown how cultures are governed by conventions that not only regulate and guarantee the production, exchange, and consumption of material goods, but also reproduce the bonds of kinship itself, which require taboos and a punitive regulation of reproduction to effect that end. [...] My point is simply that one way in which this system of compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced and concealed is through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with "natural" appearances and "natural" heterosexual dispositions. [...] The contention that sex, gender, and heterosexuality are historical productions which become conjoined and reified as natural over time has received a good deal of critical attention not only from Michel Foucault, but Monique Wittig, gay historians, and various cultural anthropologists and social psychologists in recent years. [...] The transformation of social relations becomes a matter, then, of transforming hegemonic social conditions rather than individual acts that are spawned by these conditions. [...] Just as within feminist theory the very category of the personal is expanded to include political structures, so there is a theatricalized-based and, indeed, less individually-oriented view of acts that goes some of the way in defusing the criticism of act theory as "too existentialist."

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Which leads to those who refuse to perform their assigned heterosexual gender roles. It is to be at the least an "oldball," maybe an actor or dancer. Or, if the refusal is more radical, to be "queer," or "butch" or "femme," a "drag queen," bisexual or transsexual — or any other gender possibility that is outside hetero-orthodoxy. Butler and others who adhere to her point of view believe that gender is "real" only insofar and in the specific ways it is performed. She also makes the very important distinction between performing against the dominant code in a theatre and doing so in the street. Much more is permitted onstage than off. Offstage there are no conventions of the theatre to protect a drag queen from ridicule or worse (see figure 5.6). Even remaining in the closet, being "quietly gay," as it were, is no protection against attacks ranging from stares and verbal abuse to murder. Unorthodox gender performative are not merely affronts to patriarchy; they challenge long-standing Western philosophical distinctions between appearance and reality. If one wears and can to some degree change what one "really is," then what about the existence of a settled identity or an indwelling eternally abiding soul?

Constructions of Race

If gender is performative, what about race? Does one "become" black, white, brown, red, or yellow in the same way that one becomes a woman or man? Does skin color, a set of facial features, hair, or any single attribute, or combination of attributes, indicate that a person belongs to one race or another? Are there any dependable markers of race? Skin color and all other "racial features" are extremely variable across populations.

Race is akin to ethnicity, a human cultural feature. As a cultural feature, race matters. But the importance of race as a cultural category cannot be sustained by its often purported basis in "nature." Visible marks of race are unreliable. To take "blacks" and "whites" as an instance, many so-called "whites" have darker skin than many so-called "blacks." Other visible markers such as hair texture, eye and nose shape, and so on are also unreliable — not only in relation to "black" and "white" but also with regard to other groups. Jews have sometimes been designated as a race with specific facial characteristics (big noses, thick lips, dark eyes), sometimes as a religious group with no particular racial markers. But what about under the skin? Biologists and anthropologists agree that race has no basis in genetics or biology (see Marshall box).

Because race is a cultural construct, racial identifications change in reaction to culture-specific historical forces. For example, throughout much of US history, people were placed in, and placed themselves in, very definite racial categories. But with the numbers of multiracial and multicultural children growing, and the influx of millions of people from Latin America and Asia, the categories began to collapse. In the 2000 US census, more people than ever before identified themselves as "multicultural" or refused to categorize themselves racially. Even the shift in nomenclature is important. As late as the 1970s words such as "black," "Negro," or "colored" were in general use. But today one speaks mostly of "African Americans," pointing to culture and geography rather than color. Other groups that formerly were identified by color are also now marked by nationality or ethnicity ("Chinese" or "Japanese," not "yellow," "Native American," not "red," "Indian" or "South Asian," not brown). Despite this, racial categories tied to visible markers persist and have very important effects. Ironically, even after color

fig 5.6. A drag queen at the annual Gay Pride March, Melbourne. Photograph by Robert Francis. Copyright Hutchinson Library. 155
There is No Such Thing as "Race"

Genetic diversity appears to be a continuum, with no clear breaks delineating racial groups. Last year, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) completed a contentious 4-year review of the racial and ethnic categories that will be used to define the U.S. population in federal reports, including the 2000 census. It finally settled on seven groupings: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian (added after OMB received 7000 postcards from Hawaiians) or Other Pacific Islander; White; Hispanic or Latino; and Not Hispanic or Latino. The categories could have enormous implications—from the distribution of government resources to political districting to demographic research. But as far as geneticists are concerned, they’re meaningless.

“Ridiculous” is the word cultural anthropologist John Moore of the University of Florida, Gainesville, uses to describe such racial typing. This view is based on a growing body of data that indicates, as Moore says, that “there aren’t any boundaries between races.” Geneticist Kenneth Kidd of Yale University says the DNA samples he’s examined show that there is “a virtual continuum of genetic variation” around the world. “There’s no place where you can draw a line and say there’s a major difference on one side of the line from what’s on the other side.” If one is talking about a distinct, discrete, identifiable population, Kidd adds, “there’s no such thing as race in [modern] Homo sapiens.” Indeed, the American Anthropological Association urged the government last year to do away with racial categories and, in political matters, let people define their own ethnicity. 

Anthropologists have long objected to the stereotypes that are used to classify human populations into racial groups. But the most potent challenge to such groupings has come from genetic studies of human origins. The field was “transformed” in the late 1980s, says anthropologist Kenneth Weiss of Pennsvylania State University in University Park, by an analysis of variations in mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) begun by Rebecca Cann of the University of Hawaii, Chicago, Mark Stoneking of Penn State, and the late Allan Wilson of the University of California, Berkeley. These researchers reported that diversity in mtDNA genes was two to three times greater in Africa than in Europe or the rest of the world. Assuming that the rate of change in mtDNA was fairly constant, they concluded that Africans’ mtDNA was older than that of non-Africans, and that modern humans originated from a small population that emerged from Africa and migrated around the globe.

Adrian Piper (1948– ) theorizes race both in her writings and in performance. Piper, a philosopher specializing in Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), is also a conceptual artist whose performance art and installations focus on racism, racial stereotyping, and xenophobia. One of her best-known works is Cornered (1988), a video installation that begins with Piper, dressed in dark clothes, a string of pearls around her neck, seated in the corner of a room at a table, hands folded, looking directly at the camera (see figure 5.7). The TV set on which Piper’s image appears is itself placed in the corner of the gallery with an overturned table in front of it. The set up suggests both being cornered (that is, trapped) and some kind of violent overturn. After a pause, the light-skinned Piper begins, “I’m black. Now let’s deal with this social fact and the fact of my being a black woman.” Piper’s inaugural challenge is a “speech act,” a performative. She goes on, “If I don’t tell you who I am, then I have to pass for white. And why should I have to do that? The problem with passing for white is that it is not only that it is based on sick values, which it is. It’s also that it creates a degrading situation in which I may have to listen to insulting remarks about blacks made by whites who mistakenly believe there are no blacks present. That’s asking a bit much, I’m sure you’ll agree.” Assuming a white spectator, for the next 30 minutes, Piper, earnestly but with cutting irony, dissects the emotional impact, social practices, and explicitness of racism in America.

Piper never raises her voice. She develops her points with impeccable logic. She does not speak directly of enslavement, lynchings, and segregation or give graphic examples of American racism. Her anger is understated. Presenting herself in a manner that confounds stereotyping, Piper dissects what constitutes racial identity. She asserts that according to commonly accepted beliefs that race is “in the blood,” everyone in the USA has between 5 and 20 percent black ancestry. “Most purportedly white Americans are in fact black. [...] The chances are really quite good that you are, in fact, black. What are you going to do about it?” Sarcastically, Piper invites the viewer to tell friends and employers that s/he is black. Or, Piper suggests, why not take advantage of “affirmative action” programs designed to assist blacks? Or stay silent or discredit the research or dismiss Cornered as just another “art experience.” Piper cornered the viewer, concluding the 20-minute piece with the challenge, “Now that you have this information about your black ancestry, whatever you do counts as a choice. [...] So, what are you going to do?” In Cornered and many other of her works, Piper probes the shifting ground that barely supports socially constructed racial categories. Take, for example, the Angry Art "calling card" Piper gives to people who make racist remarks or let them pass unchallenged when made by others (see figure 5.8). When someone who "looks" black "acts" white, or vice versa, the person may be accused of "passing"—pretending or performing a self that one has no legitimate claim to given the racist constructions of contemporary Euro-American society (see Piper box). But as Piper points out, the very concept of racial classification is an instrument of racism. Race, like gender, is constructed.

fig 5.7. Cornered, a video installation, 1988. Photograph courtesy of Adrian Piper.
Adrian Piper

On Passing and Not Passing

It was the New Graduate Student Reception for my class, the first social event of my first semester in the best graduate department in my field in the country. I was full of myself, as we all were, full of pride at having made the final cut [. . .]. I was a bit late, and noticed that many turned to look at – no scrutinize – me as I entered the room. I congratulated myself on having selected for wear my black velvat, bell-bottomed pantsuit (yes, it was that long ago) with the cream silk blouse and crimson vest [. . .].
The most famous and highly respected member of the faculty observed me for a while from a distance and then came forward. Without introduction or preamble, he said to me with a triumphant smirk, “Miss Piper, you’re about as black as I am.”

One of the benefits of automatic pilot in social situations is that insults take longer to make themselves felt [. . .]. What I felt was numb, and then shocked and terrified, disoriented, as though I’d been awakened from a sweet dream of unconditional support and approval and plunged into a nightmare of jeering contempt [. . .]. Finally, there was the groundless shame of the inadvertent impostor, exposed to public ridicule or accusation. For this kind of shame, you don’t actually need to have done anything wrong. All you need to do is care about others’ image of you, and fail in your actions to reinforce their positive image of themselves. Their ridicule and accusations then function to both disown and degrade you from their status, to make you as not having done wrong but as being wrong [. . .].

And I experienced (then, and at other times) that same groundless shame, not only in response to those who accused me of passing for black but also in response to those who accused me of passing for white. This was the shame caused by people who conveyed to me that I was underhanded or manipulative, trying to hide something, pretending to be something I was not, by telling them I was black, like the art critic in the early 1970s who had treated me with the respect she gave emerging white women artists in the early days of second-wave feminism, until my work turned to issues of racial identity; she then called me to verify that I was black, reproached me for not telling her, and finally disappeared from my professional life altogether [. . .].

But I’ve learned that there is no “right” way of managing the issue of my racial identity, no way that will not offend or alienate someone, because my designated racial identity itself exposes the very concept of racial classification as the offensive and irrational instrument of racism that it is. We see this in the history of classifying terms variously used to designate those brought as slaves to this country and their offspring: first “blacks,” then “darkies,” then “Negroes,” then “colored people,” then “blacks” again, then “Afro-Americans,” then “people of color,” now “African-Americans.” Why is it that we can’t seem to get it right, once and for all? The reason, I think, is that it doesn’t really matter what term we use to designate those who have inferior and disadvantaged status, because whatever term is used will eventually turn into a term of derision and disparagement in virtue of its reference to those who are derided and disparaged, and so will need to be discarded for an unsullied one.

Performance Art

Piper's pieces are performance art, a grab-bag category of works that do not fit neatly into theatre, dance, music, or visual art (see Brentano box). Much performance art puts into practice theories of performativity. This is especially true of performance art that deals with the construction of identity and in so doing enacts the slogan, "the personal is the political," a program that originated with feminist performance artists in the 1970s (see Roth box). This formulation is only possible in light of the theoretical proposition of performativity as developed by the post-structuralists. Only by recognizing that identity is constructed, not given, contested, not settled, historically and politically evolving, not fixed in "nature," can the practice of personal art be regarded as political. There are many examples of "the personal is the political" art but none more striking than Carolee Schneemann’s (1939–1975) performance, Interior Scroll (see figure 5.9). Naked, Schneemann reaches into her vulva and pulls out a long scroll from which she reads her text:

[...] there are certain films
we cannot look at
the personal clutter
the persistence of feelings
the hand-touch sensibility
the diaristic indulgence
the painterly mess
the dense gestalt
the primitive techniques.

Robyn Brentano

Performance Art

The term "performance art" first appeared around 1976 to describe the ephemeral, time-based, and process-oriented work of conceptual ("body") and feminist artists that was emerging at the time. It was also applied retrospectively to Happenings, Fluxus events, and other intermedia performances from the 1960s. Over the past thirty-five years, many styles and modes of performance have evolved, from private, introspective investigations to ordinary routines of everyday life, cathartic rituals and trials of endurance, site-specific environmental transformations, technically sophisticated multimedia productions, autobiographically-based cabaret-style performance, and large-scale, community-based projects designed to serve as a source of social and political empowerment. [...] What has come to be called performance art [...] has taken myriad forms, a result of its interdisciplinary nature (drawing from painting, sculpture, dance, theater, music, poetry, cinema, and video) and disparate influences, including [...] the Futurists, Dadaists, Constructivists, Surrealists, Abstract Expressionism, performance and art traditions of Native American and non-European cultures, feminism, new communications technologies, and popular forms such as cabaret, the music hall, vaudeville, the circus, athletic events, puppetry, parades, and public spectacles.

1994, Outside the Frame, 31-32

Moira Roth

The Personal is the Political

Performance art began in the late 1960s at the same time as the women's movement. In the general context of a highly charged and theatrical decade, radical feminists employed theatre in such events as the 1969 disruption of the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City and the nationwide WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) demonstrations
at the same time. In feminist art circles, theatrical means—raw eggs and sanitary napkins littering pristine museum spaces—were used to protest the low percentage of women in the 1970 Whitney Museum's Biennial in New York. [...]

At the same time as women plunged into public battles, they also took on, within themselves, private ones. Through consciousness-raising groups, harsh feminist manifests, poetic evocations in literature and scholarly studies, women—including many early performers—individually explored and collectively validated the substance of their lives. They re-examined and redefined the models on which they had based their self-images. As early feminists recognized that what had previously been designated (and, accordingly, often dismissed) as merely individual experience was, in actuality, an experience shared by many others, they developed the concept that "the personal is the political." It was this fresh and passionate investigation of self and of identification with other women that created the fervent supportive alliance between the first women performers and their audiences. And it was this bonding with the often all-women audiences, as much as the new personal content in the art, that accounted for the power of the early work.

1983, The Amazing Decade, 16–17


Fig 5.9. Carolee Schneemann performing Interior Scroll, 1975. Photograph courtesy of Carolee Schneemann.
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These were words Schneemann attributed to a "structuralist filmmaker" who refused even to look at Schneemann's films. Ironic, angry, and - given the taboos of that time - shocking, Schneemann's piece was personal, political, and avant-garde. She did not reject the filmmaker's estimation that her work was personal, full of touch, indulgent, messy, primitive. She rejected his rejection, arguing on the contrary that the very qualities the male filmmaker felt disqualified Schneemann's work from even being looked at were what made her work important and new. History proved her right.

In the early days of performance art, much of the audience consisted of fellow artists who freely borrowed from each other. What took place was an extremely fertile convergence of ideas, techniques, and audiences. Some artists sought out specific audiences of women or gays or political activists of a given kind. No longer was art seen as converging on the grand places and occasions of official culture, Lincoln Center or Broadway. Performance art took place in venues not previously used for performance - roofs, beaches, swimming pools, galleries, street corners, storefronts (and many more). Performance art evolved to some degree from painting (see Kaprow box 1). Therefore, unlike theatre, dance, and music much performance art was and is the work of individual artists using their own selves - bodies, psyches, notebooks, experiences - as material. The work was not shaped for large general audiences, but kept particularity and edge. It was a fine equivalent to the quirky, difficult, and stimulating thought of people like Derrida.

Allan Kaprow

Happenings

With the breakdown of the classical harmonies following the introduction of "irrational" or nonharmonic juxtapositions, the Cubists tacitly opened up a path to infinity. Once foreign matter was introduced into the picture in the form of paper (collage), it was only a matter of time before everything else foreign to paint and canvas would be allowed to get into the creative act, including real space. Simplifying the history of the ensuing evolution into a flashback, this is what happened: the pieces of paper curled up off the canvas, were removed from the surface to exist on their own, became more solid as they grew into other materials and, reaching out further into the room, finally filled it entirely. (....) Inasmuch as people visiting such Environments are moving, colored shapes too, and were counted "in," mechanically moving parts could be added, and parts of the created surroundings could then be rearranged like furniture at the artist's and visitors' discretion. And, logically since the visitor could and did speak, sound and speech, mechanical and recorded, were also soon to be in order. Odors followed.

1966, Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings, 165-66

Performance art is part of a line of the avant-garde reaching back to the turn of the twentieth century - symbolism, futurism, dada, surrealism, and so on. The immediate source of performance art was a convergence of Happenings, postmodern dance, and pop art (see figures 5.10 and 11). Allan Kaprow coined the word "Happenings" to describe art events that simply happened without picture frames, plots, or any marks of orthodox visual arts, theatre, dance, or music. In 1966, Kaprow outlined the seven qualities of Happenings (see Kaprow box 2). In his own way, he was laying the basis for "the personal is the political." Kaprow, like Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) and Andy Warhol, wanted to demystify art, debunk the establishment that controlled museums, and make art that could be performed by anyone. Kaprow proclaimed what he called "lifelike art" - not naturalism or any other kind of mimesis, but art that conformed to the processes of ordinary life. During the same period, many postmodern dancers rejected the strict codifications of both ballet and modern dance. They favored "pedestrian," or everyday, movement, let dancers speak about their own lives as they danced, and got involved in political actions (see Banes box).

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968): Extremely influential French dada artist. Among his many works are the painting Nude Descending a Staircase (1912), the construction The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (also known as the Large Glass) (1915-23), and his "readymades" - ordinary objects displayed as art. Duchamp's most notorious readymade is Fountain (1917), a urinal. Duchamp lived for many years in New York, becoming an American citizen in 1955.
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Allan Kaprow

The Seven Qualities of Happenings

1. The line between art and life is fluid, even indistinct.
2. The themes, materials, and actions of happenings are taken from anywhere but the arts.
3. Happenings should be performed in several widely spaced locales.
4. Time, which follows closely on spatial considerations should be variable and discontinuous.
5. Happenings should be performed only once.
6. Audiences should be eliminated entirely – everyone at a Happening participates in it.
7. The composition/sequence of events is not rational or narrational, but based on associations among various parts; or by chance.

1966, Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings, 88–98


fig 5.11. The dance collective Grand Union in performance at Judson Church, 1960s. Photograph by Michael Kirby. Photograph courtesy of Richard Schechner.

Mimesis: Greek word meaning “imitation.” In the Poetics Aristotle argues that a tragedy is a “mimesis of a praxis” (an action) of great enough magnitude to have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Exactly what Aristotle meant by mimesis has been the subject of much debate over the centuries. Currently, most commentators agree that Aristotle did not mean mimesis literally but as a specific artistic process of representation.
Performativity

Sally Banes

Postmodern Dance

Originally reacting against the expressionism of modern dance, which anchored movement to a literary idea or musical form, the post-modernists propose that formal qualities of dance might be reason enough for choreography, and that the purpose of making dances might be simply to make a framework within which we look at movement for its own sake. But there are other purposes post-modernism claims for dance. One is that a dance can formulate or illustrate a theory of dance [...]. Another purpose, partly inspired by phenomenological philosophers and writers, is to embody different perspectives on space, time, or orientation to gravity [...]. The breakdown of the distinction between art and life [...], the clarification of individual, discrete movements, the isolation of the essential characteristics of dance, have all become valid purposes for making a dance. So has the notion of making a dance for the pleasure of the dancer, whether or not the spectator finds it pleasing, or even accessible. The very question of what it means to create a dance can generate choreography: Is writing a score [...], an act of choreography? Is dance making an act of construction and craft or a process of decision making? In post-modern dance, the choreographer becomes a critic, educating spectators in ways to look at dance, challenging the expectations the audience brings to the performance, framing parts of the dance for closer inspection, commenting on the dance as it progresses.

1980, Terpsichore in Sneakers, 15-16

What the Gravedigger Knew about the Performative

Discussing whether or not Ophelia's suicide bars her from heaven, the more theoretical of two Gravediggers asserts, "An act hath three branches -- it is to do, to act, to perform" (Hamlet, 3 1: 11). The Gravedigger divides an action into its physical attributes ("do"), its social aspects ("act"), and its theatrical qualities ("perform"). But why does he use the word "act" twice -- first as an overall category and then as a subset of itself?

Any action consciously performed refers to itself, is part of itself. Its "origin" is its repetition. Every consciously performed action is an instance of restored behavior. Restored behavior enacted not on a stage but in "real life" is what post-structuralists call "performative." It is their contention that all social identities, gender, for example, are performative. The Gravedigger is not so much repeating himself as he is proposing a situation where the smaller ("to act") contains the larger ("an act"). He is also connecting "an act" as something accomplished in everyday life with "to act," something played on the stage. The ultimate example of "to act" is "to perform" -- to be reflexive about one's acting. Shakespeare did not have Austin, Derrida, or Butler in mind when he wrote Hamlet. But the Gravedigger's brief disquisition shows that the notion of performativity has been around a long time.

Conclusion

Theories of performativity insist that all social realities are constructed. The construction of gender, race, and identity are but three examples of an all-encompassing theory. Social life as behaved is performed in the sense that I outlined in chapter 2; every social activity can be understood as a showing of a doing. I write "as behaved" to underline the liveness of certain aspects of social life -- and to circumscribe the particular region that is most important to performance studies. This broad definition of liveness includes film, television, recorded music, telephony, and the internet. These cannot be regarded as mere reproductions; because of how they are produced and received they participate in liveness. Other parts of social life are not behaved, or at least not obviously so, such as laws, architecture, written literature, and the like. However, post-structuralist theories of performativity indicate that even these aspects of social life can be best understood as performance. Austin's performative concerned utterances only. But those who built on Austin's ideas were soon discovering a wide range of "speech acts" and applying the theory of performativity to all areas of social life. Derrida's insistence that all human codes and cultural expressions are "writing" is a powerful example of this kind of thinking.

These theories of the performative inhabit performance art, especially works dealing with gender, race, and the assertion that the personal is political. And just as theorists found the performative in all areas of personal and social life, so performance artists broke free from orthodox venues and styles of performance. Some performance art may take only