appeal to a broader public (see my pp. 214–217, where I am concerned with popular appeal, and 227).

I suppose, it's a kind of honor to find one's writing treated with exactly the sort of selective reading that according to my mentor of blessed memory, Onkel Ali Nagler, was the bane of our discipline's existence...against which he had exhorted us to stand fast...nowhere more, than in *Sources of Medieval Theatrical History*.

Cordially,

Robert K. Sarlos, Professor Emeritus of Dramatic Art
University of California, Davis

Claire Sponsler replies:

Professor Sarlos charges me with selective reading, or misreading, of his "Performance Reconstruction" essay. Professor Sarlos is correct in stating that he stresses the tentativeness of any theatrical reconstruction, its inability to stand as an exact replica of a past performance, and its dependence upon "the imaginative spirit." He is equally correct in noting that he is concerned with the popular appeal of theatrical reconstructions. I regret having omitted those views from my brief discussion of his work.

Nonetheless, I do not believe I have misrepresented his basic project: Sarlos' stated goal is a performance that, despite limitations of the reconstruction process and the need to make some concessions to a modern audience, uses historical facts to replicate as fully as possible the original theatrical event. As he says: "In other words, one must ascertain as many facts as possible to sense and convey the context [of the original performance]. Even though we cannot completely shed our individually and culturally determined points of view of history, the more information (whether in the form of facts or impressions) we possess, the more surely we are guided to that milieu that in reality is our goal: the performance from which documents, objects, and verbal and visual impressions derive and which they fragmentarily evoke" ("Performance Reconstruction," 201). This strikes me as a strong articulation of the historicist thinking I raised questions about in my essay. Unfortunately, Professor Sarlos seems to suggest that there is something nasty about my critique of theatrical reconstructions; my purpose, however, was the salutary one of calling attention to assumptions and practices that are shared by many of us who study medieval theater—myself included—and to encourage critical scrutiny of their implications.

Sincerely,

Claire Sponsler

Performance, Hegemony, and Communication Practices: Toward a Cultural Materialist Analysis

by Tobin Nellhaus

Performance and performativity have gained an increasingly visible place in critical discourse during the past decade or so. Some of the discussions of performativity have little direct bearing on performance as an artistic practice (such as theater or performance art), adopting instead a broader if sometimes more diffuse approach. The roots of this new interest go back at least to 1939, when J. L. Austin began to explore the notion of "performative utterances," investigations that eventually led to *How to Do Things With Words* in 1962. Issues of performance started cropping up in other fields, such as anthropology and ethnography; most recently concepts of performativity have been deployed within feminist and queer theory, although from another perspective the analytical tie between performance and gender has its own substantial history, marked in early twentieth century scholarship by Joan Riviere's "Womanliness as Masquerade" in 1929.

Some of these recent extra-theatrical discussions of performativity (especially gender theory) have begun to address the connection between performativity and power. Gestures in this direction appear even in Austin, who noted but did not analyze the social prerequisites of performative speech. However, the connections between performativity and power go much deeper than these discussions indicate. Performativity and power do not come into contact simply here and there, in this cultural region or that. Rather, as I will show, the process of installing cultural power and achieving consent is itself performative. In other words, performativity is connected to *hegemony*.

Hegemony is one of the central concepts of cultural materialism, or marxist cultural theory. During the late 1920s and early 1930s Antonio Gramsci developed this concept to describe rule by means of consent or ideology, rather than by directly political means or by force. It involves a structure of ideas, beliefs, values, even feelings, through which ordinary living sustains power relations. In its initial uses, the concept of hegemony suggested why workers, despite exploitation, usually tolerate capitalist power; what role intellectuals of various sorts play in maintaining bourgeois society; and how capitalist social relations could be as resilient and adaptable as they have proved to be. Recent social theorists have used the concept of hegemony to understand the functions of discourse in various types of domination (not just class), and to grasp the role of ideological opposition and resistance as *counterhegemony*. As Raymond Williams emphasized, "hegemony" places culture (in the broad sense) within the context of power relations and the social process as a totality.[1] Theater, like all cultural practices, necessarily participates in hegemonic processes. But hegemony is in constant flux, continually adjusting to changing needs and circumstances,

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searching to renew and replace modes of persuasion. This is the first clue that its character can best be described as performative.

To make good that clue, one must examine the structure of theater and its relation to society. The cultural materialist perspective enables us to consider how an analysis of hegemony clarifies the structure and dynamics of theater, and how theater contributes to hegemonic control. But it also lets us ask what theater tells us about the structure and dynamics of hegemony. The two perspectives are mutually informing: theater is both a paradigm for understanding hegemony's process, and a crucial domain for that process.

Discussions of hegemony often name various institutions as its central mechanism. Raymond Williams, for example, argued that educational institutions are the main agencies transmitting a dominant culture; he also mentions the family, the workplace, and the intellectual tradition as forces of enculturation.[2] This position recalls Althusser's point that ideology always exists within "the material existence of an ideological apparatus," even if it is only a small part of that apparatus: a religious service, a minor sports match, a school day, a political party meeting, and so forth.[3]

Without question, schools, churches, TV shows and the like disseminate ideology on a vast scale and often in subtle ways. The emphasis these theories give to ideology's materiality is extremely important. However, institutions and practices depend upon more fundamental social dynamics (among them, the mode of production), which limit and enable institutions' activities and so are essential to explaining them. Moreover, this perspective highlights the *transmission* of ideology (and the social structures governing that transmission), rather than its *production*. Thus, focusing on institutions obscures the sources of hegemony's depth, vigor, and flexibility.

In a contrasting critique of the politics of culture, Foucault showed that disciplines of knowledge—forms of "truth"—are themselves power régimes. In effect, though Foucault would not use these terms, the *episteme* or discursive formation is the primary agency of hegemony. His analysis of power/knowledge is highly compelling and has been adopted or adapted by several marxist critics. It helped inspire the concept of hegemony developed by Laclau and Mouffe, for whom hegemony "articulates" (establishes relations among) signifying elements so that they form discourses.[4] These approaches, like those of semiology, deconstruction, or psychoanalysis, analyze culture through systems of signs or meanings. But such analyses tend to leave unexplored the practical bases on which meaning systems arise and function. The consistency or regularity of discursive formations receives no explanation and appears almost fortuitous.

One position claims that institutions are the main agents of hegemony; the other gives that role to sign systems. While both approaches make valid points and stimulate provocative research, neither seriously examines the social and material dynamics grounding institutional and semiological practices. A fuller understanding must start by looking at what is most immediately, directly, and practically involved in cultural activity—the materiality of culture. Discourses cannot occur without the physical structures for their production; institutions cannot operate without the means of transmitting, organizing, and storing information. The most immediate and practical material basis for culture, upon which discourses and institutions both depend, consists of the social use and organization of the modes of communication: speech, handwriting, printing, electronics. Discourse is part of a practice involving concrete activities to accomplish goals and maintain or transform given conditions. It is a form of action: or as I will explain shortly, communication is performative, and so has intimate ties with theatricality.

Thus, to elucidate the connection between hegemony and performance, I will sketch a "triangle" connecting hegemony, communication practices, and performance. Specifically, I will argue that the primary agent of hegemony is not education, not discourse, but rather the social use and organization of communication. Moreover, if communication is the main material basis of hegemony, and communication is performative, then hegemony must be performative.

The first side of my triangle is the connection between communication and performance. In saying that communication is performative, I am referring to the work of J. L. Austin and other speech act theorists, who maintain that discourse is a form of action, through which people give information, state a conviction, make apologies, offer comfort, announce their presence, and so forth. (It is possible for the audience to be the speaker, or the world "at large.") Often people communicate in order to affect their audience in some manner; but the basic effect of a successful speech act is simply to be understood, and sometimes speakers aim only for that. According to the speech act theorists, language must fulfill certain rules in suitable contexts to be valid or to form a speech act of a certain type. For example, the imperative "Come to my office" could be a command if uttered by one's boss, an invitation if said by a friend, a joke if the speaker has no office, and an insult if said to someone who cannot possibly come. Clearly, speech act rules depend on social relations: orders, for instance, are issued by a superior to a subordinate. According to the discursive rules and contexts, one's speech creates various social or institutional facts and events such as invitations, promises, apologies, or arguments.[5]

However, the way in which speech acts are "performative" needs elaboration, particularly since the term suggests theatricality. As I see it, performativity in communication has three major facets: intentional, incorporational, and imaginal. This triad in fact applies to all social practices, since practices involve purposes, physical acts, and images of what one is doing. Because these are facets of social practice, this triad is both similar to and applies across the three principal components of the social: structures, agents, and discourses. (I am using "discourses" somewhat broadly to refer to structured meaning-systems, whether or not they have verbal form.) In these elements' complex and mutually conditioning interaction, structures only exist by virtue of agents' activities (practices), but those activities are conditioned and enabled by social structures; social structures depend upon (but cannot be reduced to) agents' concepts, but concepts emerge from (structure-dependent) practices and may transform structures and agents.[6] Simi-

larly, practices become incorporated into agents' bodies when they carry out their intentions, but are possible only because they *have* bodies; and embodied intentional agency both generates and is guided by schematic images.

Speech acts are intentional in the sense that unless people wished some sort of effect—no matter how elementary, implausible, or unconscious—they would not utter words at all. Obviously, this neither limits meaning to what was intended nor excludes unconscious motives from being expressed. However, the performatives uttered by dramatic characters generally seek two kinds of effect (actually three, as I will explain later). There is the effect within the world of the drama that a character seeks to have on other characters. There is also the effect created by the play as a single complex performative addressed to the spectators within certain theatrical conditions. We can distinguish between the character's apparent intention in speaking and acting, and the author's or director's in making the character speak and act that way. (The situation is akin to all types of double meaning or irony in which one audience gets one message, while another gets quite a different one—often including a sly evaluation of the first audience.) The layers of intention in theater show that the meaning of an utterance is not caused, determined, or restricted by the speaker's intention: the audience construes meaning within the context of the performance. Meaning (the discursive and imaginal level) is a product of a larger social field; nevertheless, speaker and intention both participate in that social field, and so both play important roles in meaning-formation.

This brings us to the second aspect of performatives, their incorporational aspect. I choose this term for several reasons, one being that actual, concrete social and cultural entities—social formations, individual and collective agents, and the signs that they produce—all embody (incorporate) a complex set of social relationships and dynamics. Speech acts are no exception: as Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes, a performative's viability depends upon the speaker's social position, which the performative utterance incorporates. An order is not an order unless the speaker has power over the listener; a commencement ceremony is void if nobody has the authority to confer degrees.[7] The incorporation of social relations organizes, enables, and delimits how intentions may be realized, for if a speaker is not invested with authority by a social structure or by the audience, or somehow loses that authority, then he or she will not be heard; the speech act will fail. Often, if a speaker already knows or assumes that a certain speech act will fail, he or she will never intend to perform it. The authorization of speakers is closely tied to dynamics of class, gender, and race. But it is also connected to speakers' language skills, and to the mode of communication they employ. For example, due to current social and institutional commitments to writing, written documents often gain more trust than oral testimony, even though both can lie. The cultural viability of theatrical performance similarly depends on the social use of speech and writing, as shown for example in the greater status of literary theater over improvisational forms.

The third aspect of verbal performatives, its imaginal nature, is less widely recognized. By "imaginal," I have in mind the images or even very schematic models that usually underlie thought and language. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have shown, linguistic research is revealing the crucial and pervasive role of imagery (particularly metaphors) in thought and action, and the derivation of much of this imagery from embodied activity.[8] Often this imagery is deeply embedded within language, as for example the schema of "containment" in a phrase like "Give me a moment to take that in." In this manner, ordinary requests, imperatives, and assertions depend on images or percepts to achieve their effects. Categorization, syntax, and larger discursive structures such as scientific and social theories all normally have models or metaphors embedded within them.[9] For this reason the discursive component of the social must be viewed as highly imaginal.

To return to the structure of theatrical performance, the play as produced on stage is governed by and transformatively concretizes an enormous set of images and imaginings, which may (or may not) have been principally borne by a script, but which we may describe as scriptive because of its role in shaping and directing performance. So in addition to the effects that a character's performatives seek upon other characters and upon the audience, it seeks an effect as a reproduction and transformation of that imaginal, scriptive fabric.[10] When an utterance has two different audiences or demands only an indirect effect, its imaginal aspect often becomes emphasized. Theatrical performance, which engages the audience mentally without demanding action, is (one might say) a performative in the heuristic or hypothetical mode, focussing on the imaginal. In particular, it focuses on the words and actions of the characters, who are imaginary agents. Stage action becomes a conceptualization of real actions, or a concretization of social and cultural ideology.

Communication is performative because it consists of speech acts, and its performativity possesses intentional, incorporational, and imaginal aspects. With this we can move on to the second side of the triangle: the connection between communication and hegemony.

As we saw, speech acts must fulfill certain rules to be valid. Similarly, a statement must obey epistemic rules, rules of knowledge, to be adjudged true. These epistemic rules compose a kind of social structure; more importantly here, however, they also form a type of imaginal structure.[11] As I have shown elsewhere, communication practices condition and generate the dominant discursive régime, which plays an important role in structuring the performance strategies of theater and drama. For instance, the dynamics of medieval manuscript culture led figural strategies such as allegory and symbolism to dominate writing and performance, as we see in the morality plays and in the intertwining of figural techniques with elements of social realism in the Corpus Christi cycles. Print culture, in contrast, fostered positivism and theatrical verisimilitude, culminating in the naturalist movement and psychological realism. Speech acts and theatrical performances, then, are in large part governed by rules generated by the structures and practices of communication.[12] Thus the dominant rules of discourse do not directly express the hegemonic group's worldview: instead,

that group must work within the imaginal forms and strategies that the communication structure generates, and even if the hegemonic group controls the dominant mode of communication, there is always the possibility that its interests will conflict with the dominant discursive structure.

Communication's involvement in hegemony is not simply epistemic, however. Communication practices themselves generate social and power relations incorporated within and underlying social, institutional, discursive and other formations. Some practices control access to different media, such as the laws restricting the printing press in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the regulation of television broadcast stations today. Limitations on access can be imposed not only by laws but also by class, gender, or racial divisions. Other communication practices create distinctive communities, for example, through the specialized vocabularies developed by urban gangs, academics, and so forth; or through shared reading matter such as the Bible or Derrida. Distinct languages mark membership in empowered or disempowered language communities, thus shaping the identification of Self and Other. Writing itself imposes a division between the literate and the nonliterate. Most importantly, communication practices create the social division between "mental" and "manual" labor—the division between those who concentrate knowledge among themselves and have the power to conceive, plan, or direct the actions or thoughts of others, versus those who must execute instructions or are subjected to others' decisions.

Communication's role in hegemony also involves intentions to produce certain effects upon audiences. From a social perspective, communication performs most cultural reproduction, which occurs not only in education, but also through the arts. At times the pedagogic function of theater has been explicit, for example in the Middle Ages when plays were "books for the unlettered," or in Brecht's arguments for didactic theater. But as with intentions on stage (which are directed toward the immediate dramatic situation, the fundamental interchange between stage and audience, and the scriptive imagination) teaching has a triple goal: to impart some sort of manifest content, be it theater history or mathematics; to shape the learner into a particular kind of person, with certain skills, attitudes, and expectations; and to reproduce (and perhaps transform) social structures and relations. Just as schools largely prepare people to fit their allotted social positions, the arts often serve to confirm their audiences' conceptions of themselves and their place.

On that note let me turn now to the third side of the triangle, the connection between hegemony and performance. Again we find the intentional, incorporational, and imaginal aspects of performativity. Since hegemony involves social struggles rather than individual interactions, hegemony as a goal-oriented activity is not (strictly speaking) governed by intentions, but by interests. As much as its power allows, every social group establishes ideas, values, and beliefs guiding actions that support its interests. Likewise, people generally perform speech acts to persuade others to do or believe something. Such persuasion is the central act of hegemony. To the

degree that a group persuades others to accept its terms, it exerts the "intellectual and moral leadership" which Gramsci found essential to securing rule through consent.[13] Moreover, the pursuit of a particular or local interest often unwittingly reproduces the dominant social relations: a classic example is the struggle for better wages, which implicitly affirms wage labor, but an equally telling example in modern theater history is the pursuit of political drama within the dominant systems of financing, employment, authority, and spectatorship.

Recognizing such contradictions, marxists have distinguished between immediate interests, which focus on what is possible within given social relations, and fundamental interests, which concern the reproduction or transformation of social relations.[14] This contrast may be further refined by aligning it with the resolution of society into structures, agents, and discourses. Immediate interests thus pertain to how one may influence the behavior of other (individual or collective) agents; fundamental interests, to the reproduction and transformation of social structures; and discursive interests, to an individual's or group's attitudes, knowledge, ideology and the like, inasmuch as they direct and justify the agent's own behavior. The distinction between immediate, fundamental, and discursive interests is comparable to the three types of intention in theater: a character's performed objective within a play is "immediate" in the sense that it aims to affect characters and actions existing within a dramatic situation made possible by a kind of theater; the drama's performed objective is "fundamental" in that it sustains or transforms the theatrical relation between stage and audience; and the play's performed objective is "discursive" in its efforts to (re)constitute scriptive imagery and ideology. Arguably, all performatives have this three-pronged effect.

Interests are organized and fulfilled by institutions, discourses, and other structures incorporating underlying social dynamics. One of the main ways such formations accomplish this is through their processes, rules, and rituals; thus incorporation has strongly behavioral nature. Indeed, acts of persuasion are not necessarily conscious; many occur as a practical matter, through ordinary or customary activities that seldom gain even a second thought. The "common sense" and "matter-of-fact" qualities of hegemonic "truths" are thus embedded within practical life. In particular, they are embedded (incorporated) within the body: this is the other principal reason for speaking of performativity's "incorporational" aspect. The body is a central node in the formation of power, since it is the locus of so many fundamental capacities, such as labor, procreation, pleasure, and communication. It is important epistemologically as well, since practice conditions consciousness. Conversely, embodying ideas "naturalizes" them while defining the nature of the body (e.g., as mechanical, organic, maternal, martial, etc.). Toward this end the body on stage serves as a model of body concepts, behaviors, and practices. Moreover, the deeds enacted on stage imply or actively demonstrate theories of social organization and causation, and thereby incorporate ways of acting and thinking.

However, insofar as hegemony is conscious, one can speak of moral and

intellectual leadership. Leadership cannot occur without an underlying vision of society, or to use current jargon, an imaginary. Hegemony's imaginary corresponds to the imaginal facet of speech acts, and consists of images of what is, and what could or should be.[15] More specifically, as Laclau and Mouffe argue, hegemony forms identifications and equivalencies between various circumstances, practices, or institutions, such as the identification of nationhood with divine right, or an equivalency drawn between the civil rights movement and the feminist movement.[16] For example, American melodrama employed varying strategies of identification (common ground, antithesis, and the assumed or hegemonic "we") to suit changing goals and pressures.[17] Such identifications are most successful when they depend on or claim to satisfy real needs and desires, thus achieving the status of common sense. Insofar as theater exerts leadership through ideology, representation, and personal example, its ability to model forms of selfhood and sociality becomes paramount. In particular, the fact that characters are imaginary individuals in a social (or even antisocial) milieu gives them a direct tie to individual self-images and social imaginaries.

A cultural materialist analysis shows that theater, speech acts, and hegemony have a similar performative character. Their performativity possesses imaginal, incorporational, and intentional aspects; moreover, the intentional aspect aims at immediate interests between social agents, the fundamental social dynamic, and discursive interests (such as ideologies and manifest contents). The primary basis for hegemony, which gives it a performative character, is the social organization of communication practices. Several consequences follow this analysis, revising the concept of hegemony, offering historiographical considerations, and illuminating the ontology of theater.

The incorporational, intentional, and imaginal facets of hegemony are, so to speak, the phenomenological counterparts of the ontological domains of the social—structures, agents, and discourses. But the latter triad also distinguishes levels of hegemonic struggle. Hegemony is not an amorphous "glue" holding society together: it is itself structured, and the agential level and (still more) the structural level generally have a much slower rhythm of transformation than the rhetoric of day-to-day political mobilization. Those discursive activities must be conducted through the resources offered by and within the constraints of the communication structures, which themselves generate some of the social divisions instigating struggle.

There are differing kinds or degrees of hegemonic crisis, corresponding to these three levels. Given hegemony's foundation in communication practices, one might infer that the most severe crises would arise from radical changes to the social organization of communication, such as an alteration in the dominant mode of communication or its displacement by another mode. Further, such crises would presumably involve sharp epistemic ruptures, placing into question what knowledge consists of and how it proceeds; and since hegemony is performative, one might also expect to find sharp transformations in performance strategies.

Cultural and theater history appear generally to confirm such expectations. Classical Greece was the first society to achieve relatively widespread literacy. As writing became the dominant mode of communication, new modes of thought arose. The rise of literacy contributed to the development of tragedy, distinguishing theater as a new cultural genre not assimilable to ritual or other performance forms. Eventually the communications revolution provoked controversies over the nature and goals of thought. Plato's attack on the Sophists, his pursuit of "truth" over "opinion," and his paradoxical critique of writing are perhaps only the best-known results of this revolution.[18] With the fall of Rome, European literate culture declined and theatrical performance largely ceased, but each step in the revival of literate activity brought a renascence and eventually a medieval "rebirth" of theater as well.

The introduction of the printing press around 1450 had similarly profound reverberations. Changes were far from immediate, but within a century, printing created a distinctly new communications environment that fostered new forms of individualism, alterations in religious experience associated with Protestantism, innovations in methodology connected to the Scientific Revolution, and so forth.[19] Theatrical practice also transformed: verisimilitude increasingly became the goal behind scenic design, playwriting, and acting. Notably, the theorists of Neoclassicism fretted endlessly about truth, knowledge, plausibility, audience ignorance, and education.

Significant changes need not only derive from technological revolutions: changes in the use and organization of an existing mode of communication may also alter discourse and performance. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, regular newspaper and magazine publication began. These helped to distinguish a public sphere and a private sphere, and within the private sphere, gave a new place to emotional projection and response—in a word, sentiment. That mode of interaction became part of sentimental comedy, domestic tragedy, and ultimately melodrama and its cinematic and televised descendants.

Arguably, the succession of avant-garde movements since 1900 is connected to the spread of radio, film, and television. Just how deep such connections might be is, I think, far from clear; in any case, the personal computer and the Internet are likely to have much more radical consequences, although when and how they might affect strategies of performance is still an open question. These issues depend ultimately on whether and in what ways electronic modes of communication become dominant.

That dominance is a social and political matter. Neither quantity nor technology alone determines what mode is dominant. For instance, a society (or a particular social group) may possess writing, but subordinate it to speech: such a society should still be considered an oral culture, and its discursive rules would still be largely oral. Even without new technology, new uses of an existing technology can generate significant modifications in the *episteme*. Print culture can therefore be periodized into book-and-broadsheet and book-and-periodical eras, which share many ground rules but also reveal differences. Additional periods might also be found.

So far I have considered the ways that changes in communication prac-