The Anthropology of Theater and Spectacle

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*Annual Review of Anthropology* is currently published by Annual Reviews.

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THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF THEATER
AND SPECTACLE

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KEY WORDS: performance, cultural anthropology, folklore, linguistics, cultural meaning

INTRODUCTION: THE STUDY OF THEATER AND SPECTACLE

In this essay I explore studies of theater and spectacle as distinct cultural institutions. Several kinds of cultural activity closely related to this topic have extensive literatures of their own, but I do not treat them here. These include play and games, sports and contests, verbal art and poetry, and dance and music outside the context of theater and spectacle.

The distinction is arbitrary. The boundary between theater and spectacle and many other forms of enactment is difficult to determine. Theatrical activity is a component of many performance genres, and vice versa. Here I attempt to elucidate the specifically theatrical aspect of human life. I have not limited myself to works written by anthropologists. Indeed, I hope to excite anthropologists with an awareness of the work done in other fields.

This essay treats 1. the study of performance in anthropology and related disciplines, 2. the institutions of theater and spectacle, 3. specific genres of theater and spectacle, and 4. the creation of cultural meaning within frameworks of theater and spectacle.
THE STUDY OF PERFORMANCE IN ANTHROPOLOGY

Historical and Theoretical Background

During the past two decades the social sciences and humanities have seen an exciting intellectual development: a "breakthrough into performance," to quote the title of an influential essay by Hymes (137). The "breakthrough" is a realization among researchers in humanistic disciplines that active performance, undertaken in real time in the presence of a body of designated observers, contributes essentially to what cultural materials mean, and therefore affects interpretation of those materials.

Sociocultural anthropologists, anthropological linguists, and folklorists have studied performance in order to gain insight into more traditional subject matter. Thus what is loosely termed "performance theory" has been applied to ritual by researchers such as Turner (219–225), Kapferer (144), and Frisbie (107); to interaction structures in language by, among others, Beeman (41), Briggs (62), Duranti (83, 84), Irvine (140), Kuipers (156), Sherzer (204, 205), Tyler (226), and Urban (227); and to the structure of enactment in folkloric narrative genres, often termed "verbal art," by folklorists such as Bauman (28–30), Ben-Amos & Goldstein (47), and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (152). Studies of humor often require performative treatment, as seen in studies by Apte (10) and Willeford (233).

Anthropologists have studied performance largely for what it can show about other human institutions such as religion, political life, gender relations, and ethnic identity. Less study has been devoted to performance per se: its structure, its cultural meaning apart from other institutions, the conditions under which it occurs, and its place within broad patterns of community life. This neglect is particularly noticeable with respect to performative activities designed specifically to "entertain": theater and spectacle. This is surprising because theater and spectacle are universal human institutions, to which most societies devote much time and energy.

In anthropology, the earliest theoretically influential work on performance was carried out by Bateson and Mead in Bali. Their film, *Trance and Dance in Bali* (27), and the accompanying monographs by Jane Belo (44–46) laid the foundations for considering traditional performance a legitimate field of study. Bateson’s later work on the New Guinean ritual performance, *Naven* (25), and on the nature of play and schizophrenia (24, 26) added an important set of intellectual tools to the study of performance, demonstrating that a culturally conditioned cognitive state frames and orients human action.

Other early anthropological works emphasizing indigenous theater traditions include a remarkable study of the Shi’a Muslim *ta’ziyeh* passion drama in Azerbaijan by Ivar Lassy, a student of Edward Westermarck (160), and studies of Native American theater traditions by Frank Speck (Cherokee)
(210), R. B. Spicer (Yaqui) (211), and Julian Steward (Ute) (212). These studies, while interesting, did not found a tradition of theater studies in anthropology.

The elaborate performance traditions of Asia were especially suggestive for anthropologists in the post World War II period. Milton Singer’s study *When a Great Tradition Modernizes* (207) introduced the notion of “cultural performance” as an institution embodying central symbolic aspects of a cultural tradition.

Victor Turner, in his early works on Ndembu ritual (221, 222), included a great deal of performance material in developing the concepts of liminality and reversal in human action. These ideas were picked up by students of theatricality including Beeman (32, 33, 35–37), Davis (72, 73), and Schechner (196–199). In his 1974 analysis of historical and social events such as revolutions and social disturbances (221, 223–225), Turner extended his concept of the “social drama” to include the structures of ritual. Turner’s work, except for his specific analysis of Ndembu ritual, was largely programmatic and inspirational. He mentored students of performance but did not himself carry out extensive direct studies of performance traditions.

Geertz attempted to demonstrate the interrelationship between performance and other general dimensions of culture such as religion, politics, and normative modes of personal conduct in his studies of Balinese life. However, Geertz rarely dealt with performance forms in detail, preferring to discuss them in general terms (114, 115). His most celebrated study of a cultural performance was not of a staged performance but of a sporting event, the Balinese cockfight (113). In a more recent study, *Negara*, he discusses the inherent theatricality of the political construction of the Balinese state (116). Once again he deals not with the structures of specific performances but with the generalized structure of the performance aesthetic.

Over the past 10 years folklorists have emphasized the performative, as opposed to the textual, aspects of folkloric materials. Dell Hymes’s seminal essay (137), which suggests that the meaning of folkloric material inheres in its performance, was an important portent of this new direction. Richard Bauman has been a leader in developing a careful model of oral literature as communication. In this model he analyzes performance events as a means of identifying the fusion of text and context (28–31).

Sociolinguistics has experienced its own “breakthrough into performance.” Here again, Hymes has been a leader. In his *Foundations in Sociolinguistics* (138), he established the model for the study of the performative aspect of language use. He applied this model in his studies of ethnopoetics (139). Paul Friedrich’s work has continually emphasized the use of performative language to achieve concrete social and aesthetic ends. In his book *The Language Parallax* (106) he posits a “poetic imagination” lying at the base of all linguist-
tic function. Michael Silverstein has interjected the pragmatism of Peirce and Austin into a theory suggesting that language accomplishes concrete aims through its performative dimensions (206). The study of metaphor and metapophoric processes by researchers such as Fernandez (100) has likewise aided researchers in understanding the construction of symbolic representation in performance genres. The strength of these conceptions of language is underscored by observational studies in sociolinguistics. Schegloff (200, 201), Sherzer (204, 205), Tyler (226), and Urban (227), among others, demonstrate that if speakers are to achieve their aims they must use performative skills within the context of discourse.

Richard Schechner has borrowed heavily from both Gregory Bateson and Victor Turner to develop a series of approaches to the study of both traditional and modern theatricality. With the trained eye of the director he has analyzed the ritual and cognitive underpinnings of theatrical performance in detail. Schechner has shown that to study performance a researcher must study far more than just the event that appears before an audience. He has drawn attention to the long process of preparation and rehearsal that has its own socially determined structure. He has also developed several approaches for investigating the intrinsic relationship between performance reality and the events of the real world in which performance is enacted.

He has, moreover, continually treated the stage as a laboratory of performance, experimenting with various performance elements to observe the effects on both performers and audience. One of the most consistent techniques he has used in his work is the incorporation of elements of folk performance into his Western, avant-garde theatrical productions (193–195). His production of Brecht’s Mother Courage, for example, incorporated such features of Indian folk performance as the consumption of food, actors’ remaining in full view of the audience when offstage, and lengthy performance. The production was later staged in villages in India with some success (196:104). Savran’s study of Schechner’s performing group documents the legacy of his experimentation (192).

Schechner pioneered in expanding the scope of theater analysis, but he has not been alone. A number of other theater scholars have aimed to study the entire range of performance phenomena. Zarilli’s review of the field of performance studies (240, 241) draws on Schechner, and on the work of Turner, MacAloon (168), and Handelman (127). Other scholars have also tried to expand theater research to include semiotic dimensions (4, 56, 88, 202), and sociological contextualization of performance (17, 49, 63, 72, 86, 87, 122, 185, 186). Several researchers have sought the origins of theater in cultural terms. Theodore Gaster has attempted to trace modern theater to ancient Middle Eastern roots (112a). One of the most anthropologically sensitive works is Ur-Drama by E. T. Kirby (151).
Considerably less work has been done to refine the notion of spectacle. MacAlloon (167, 168) and Handelman (126–128) have done much of the modern research on the anthropology of public events and spectacles, although a body of literature on this topic is growing (77, 87, 105, 134, 165).

Theoretical inspiration for anthropological study of performance has come from only a few primary sources. Such sources on the structure of ritual—often used as an analogy for performance events—have been mentioned above, particularly in conjunction with Turner’s work. Michail Bakhtin’s work (19, 19a,b) has consistently inspired many students of performance—particularly his views on the transforming relationship between art and the mundane world. Kenneth Burke (62a,b,c) has likewise stimulated performance theory, especially as his views have been filtered through the work of Hymes and Goffman. Burke’s “dramatistic” view of human existence emphasizes the human use of symbolic materials in communication and the human intent to affect others through symbolic action. Burke makes a major distinction between motion and action in human life. Things move, but human beings act, and it is only through human motivated action that meaningful symbolic transformation of reality can occur. Thus a rock rolling down a mountain embodies no intrinsic symbolic transformation of reality. If someone throws the rock through the window of a house, then this becomes a symbolic act that will require interpretation and will have consequences both for the rock thrower, and for the persons into whose house the rock was thrown (150). Motivated symbolic action of this sort is the foundation on which theatrical meaning rests.

Alfred Lord (166) broadened the attention of folklorists from exclusive focus on text to a study of verbal art as enacted in public. Pierre Bourdieu’s work on the concrete effects of language use in social life (57) has also influenced this area. John Blacking (53) has suggested that the basis for all drama lies in the human physical impulse to mark rhythm through dance.

Erving Goffman’s numerous studies of theatrical aspects of social life (119–121) have been expanded by others to encompass the study of performance events. A seminal concept in Goffman’s work is the psychological “frame” imposed by humans on social activity. Actions within such a frame are governed by rules of behavior separate from those governing the world of everyday action in which they are embedded. The frame concept is borrowed from Bateson (24) but is elaborated in much of Goffman’s work (121). Students of performance, notably Schechner and Turner, have used the notion of frames to describe the relationship between performance events and the “normal” world. Garfinkel’s ethnomethodological studies (109) of the “routine grounds of everyday behavior” have enabled extensive investigation of theatrical convention. The work of Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (69a) has also attracted the attention of performance scholars. He has pioneered investigation of the
phenomenon of “flow.” For Csikszentmihalyi, flow denotes the cognitive state attained when total engagement with an activity is achieved, such that consciousness of the physical body is lost. Good examples of flow are the states of bodily unawareness attained when driving a car, typing, or playing a musical instrument. Flow has been used to describe the transformative state that excellent performers achieve during the course of performance (39, 40, 196–198, 199:247).

*The Study of Performance Traditions in Specific Cultures*

Singer’s influential early study of cultural performance focused on India, but few anthropologists have answered Singer’s call for additional studies in Indian and Sri Lankan theater. A few anthropologists have done fieldwork in South Asia centering on theatrical traditions. Studies include Beeman’s comparison of film and performance traditions (34), Kapferer’s classic study of Sri Lankan *thovil* (144–146), Ostor’s analysis of Bengali ritual performance (177), and Reed’s study of the ritual and political significance of Kandyan dance in Sri Lanka (186a).

However, the bulk of research on South Asian theater has been undertaken by drama scholars and ethnomusicologists. The work of some of these scholars has drawn on anthropological theory and methodology. These include Ashton’s study of Yakasagana (12), Awasthi’s careful analysis of the cultural underpinnings of Indian performance traditions (14–16), Emigh’s excellent work on masked drama (89, 92, 93), Erdman’s study of patronage and social support for Rajasthani performance (95), Hansen’s study of *nautunki* (129), Schechner’s (198) and Hess’ (133) work on the *ramlila*, and Zarilli’s definitive studies of *kathakali* and other South Indian performance forms (237–243). Many other theater studies are either historical or largely descriptive in nature. Nevertheless, useful overall surveys of Indian and Ceylonese theater have been undertaken by De Zoete (74, 75), De Zoete & Spies (76), Gargi (110, 111), Mathur (172), Parmar (179), and Vatsyayan (229, 230). Studies of specific traditions include Hawley’s (131) and Hein’s (132) work on *raslila*, Jones’ (143) on *kathakali*, and Marglin’s (171) on Puri ritual drama. Mukhopadhyay (173, 174), Vatuk (231), and Wade (232) have prepared collections of smaller studies on a variety of traditional drama and narrative traditions.

Following in the tradition of Bateson and Mead, many anthropologists of theater and spectacle have looked at Southeast Asia—particularly Indonesia. Aside from the work of Geertz (113–116) cited above, anthropological descriptions of performance forms in Indonesia are provided by Peacock (181–183) and Keeler (147), who detail the performance forms of *ludruk* and *wayang kulit*. Lansing (159) has provided a study of institutional support for Balinese theatrical performance. Anthropologically important work has also
been carried out by theater scholars and ethnomusicologists. A lot of attention has been devoted to dance drama in Indonesia. Bandem & deBoer (20) provide an important overview of the changing field of dance. Foley (103, 104) likewise investigates the practice of dance drama from the standpoint of the performer, emphasizing particularly the role of trance. In addition to Keeler’s work (147), Clara van Groenendael (67, 68) has also dealt extensively with the art of shadow puppetry. Shadow puppetry in Malaysia is examined by Sweeney (103, 104). Emigh (89–91, 94) studies a wide variety of masked traditions in the region. Brandon (60) provides an invaluable broad survey of literature on dance and drama in the region.

Anthropological studies of performance traditions in other areas of the world have been less extensive. Japan, with its rich performing arts traditions, has rewarded study by theater scholars, but little work has been done by anthropologists. Research being done in Japan centers largely on the classical traditions of noh and kabuki. There is a vast literature on both traditions. Bowers general survey of Japanese theater (58) focuses on these two forms. Bethe & Brazell (50) have come the closest to an ethnographic treatment of noh, and Renondeau (187) has dealt with Buddhist elements in this art form. Ernst (96) and Leiter (162) have carried out somewhat historical and literary-based studies of kabuki. Hoff (135) presents a masterful study of shrine-based folk dance-drama (kagura and related forms). Araki’s historical study of medieval ballad-drama (kōwaka) (10a) provides important insights for the study of today’s theater. Yamaguchi (234) examines the comparative role of the clown in Japan and in other cultural traditions. Yamamoto (236) provides an account of a festival in Northeast Japan that includes dance-drama elements. Beeman examines the contemporary theater director Tadashi Suzuki and his ties with traditional theater forms (39, 40). Hsieh has written an outstanding ethnographic study on the little-known Taiwanese hand-puppet tradition (136a), and Mackerras (169) offers one of the few comprehensive studies of Chinese theater traditions that takes a broad view of theater in its cultural context.

Middle Eastern theater traditions have been the focus of a number of anthropologically informed studies. Beeman has provided an overview of the entire region (42). Gaster has attempted to show the role of drama in ancient Mesopotamia (112a). Metin And has written several studies of the theatrical traditions of Turkey including karagöz, the Turkish shadow-puppet theater; and orta-oyunu, a comic improvisatory tradition (5–9). Iranian traditional theater has been the focus of several surveys by Beza’i (51), Jannati-Ata’i (141), and Rezvani (188). Traditional theater in Iran is seen in two primary forms. The first form is ta’zīyeh, a passion drama focusing on the martyrdom of Imam Hosein, grandson of the prophet Mohammed and fourth leader of Shi’a Muslims. Beeman (33, 35, 37, 38, 43), Chelkowski (66), Ghaffari (117), and Lassy (160) have presented analyses of various aspects of this form. The
second form is a comic improvisatory form known by various names, but often referred to as ru-hozî. In addition to treatments in the broad surveys mentioned above, this form has been specifically studied by Beeman (32, 36, 40–42) and Gafary (108). Baghban (18a) has investigated folk theater in the Herat region of Afghanistan. An overall review of Arab theater has been undertaken by Al-Khozai (1a) and Landau (158a). Slyomovics (208, 209) has dealt with traditional Egyptian Arab performance genres, particularly those performed by women.

Other world areas have been studied more sparsely. In Africa, Drewal and Drewal (81) have studied the role of women in West African performing art. Kennedy (148) has written a general monograph dealing with drama throughout the continent. Kisliuk (154, 155) examines the role of dance and performance in the lives of Pygmies. Fabian (97) has written a classic work about the creation and performance of a politically motivated drama by the Luba people of Shaba province in Zaire. General surveys of African theater materials are provided by East (87a) and Fiebach (100a). Research in Spain, Latin America, and the Caribbean has covered a variety of topics. In Mexico, Brandes (59) has examined festivals and their social and political context; Briggs (62) and Urban (227) have dealt with the performative dynamics of verbal art and discourse, and Oettinger (176) has treated masks and masked performance. Taussig has analyzed the concept of the devil as it pervades such Latin American festivals as the diablada found in many Andean countries. Crawford (69), Flores (102), and Johnson (142) have written about the Spanish language pastoral drama, called pastorella in Mexico and the American Southwest. Nunley & Bettelheim (175) and Yamaguchi & Naito (235) have explored the variety of Caribbean festivals and festival arts. DaMatta (70, 71, 71a) has written definitive studies of the Brazilian Carnival in the context of Brazilian society.

Anthropologists writing on the performance traditions of native peoples of the Americas have largely emphasized ritual traditions. Frisbie (107) has edited an admirable collection of studies on a wide variety of such ritual traditions. Babcock (18), Grimes (124), Kurath (157), Kurath & Garcia (158), Spicer (211), and Tedlock (217a) have written on drama and ritual in the Southwestern Pueblo Native American tribes. Lawrence (161) has analyzed the rodeo from both Euro-American and Native American perspectives. Steward (212) has described a Ute bear ceremony with definite dramatic overtones. Sherzer (204) has dealt with performative aspects of narrative among the Kuna Indians of the San Blas Islands of Panama.

Surprisingly little work on Western performance traditions has been undertaken by anthropologists. Notable exceptions are studies of aspects of contemporary theater and their relevance for understanding culture by Adler (1), Alland (2), Beeman (37, 39, 40), Dening (79), Duranti & Brenneis (85),
Garner & Turnbull (112), Giaccè (118), McClard (172a), Peterson (184), Swiderski (215), and Titon (217b). Mumming traditions (characterized by the use of masks), particularly those of Newfoundland, stand apart as having a unique attraction for anthropological fieldwork. Important studies have been carried out by Halpert & Story (125), Handelman (126), Robertson (190), Sider (205a), and Szwed (216). Glassie (118a) has written on Irish mumming, in particular.

Other social historians, folklorists and sociologists have made serious attempts to analyze drama and theater from a theoretical standpoint as a broadly conceived Western social institution. These include Armstrong (11), Blau (54a), Burns (63), Davis (72, 73), Deldime (78), Des Bouvrue (80), Duvignaud (86, 87), Goodland (122), Little (165), McNamara (172b), and Manning (170). Wilmeth (233a,b) has provided a set of excellent bibliographic sources for the study of theatrical traditions throughout North America.

That theater scholars, by contrast, have applied anthropological methods and concepts to the study of Western performance forms can be seen in the writings of Alter (4), Aston & Savona (13), Bab (17), Barba (21–23), Beneix (48), Bennett (49), Borie (55), Bouissac (56), Canziani (64), Carlson (65), Elam (88), Fischer-Lichte (101), Foster (105), Harrison-Pepper (130), Hornby (136), Kisliuk (153), Lesnick (163), Pavis (180), Phelan (185), Read (186), Rickner (189), Savran (192), Schechner (193–198), Schechner & Appel (199), Schmid & van Kesteren (202), Senelick (203), and Tomasio (218).

Western opera is a theater form with strong affinities to the music-theater performance forms of Asia. Modern studies of Western opera [e.g. Helfgot & Beeman (132a), Kerman (149), Lindenberger (164), Robinson (191), and Smith (209a)], although not carried out primarily by anthropologists, investigate the performance effects of combined song and acting. Investigation of the special conventions of this theatrical form helps to elucidate performance in other areas of human life. Opera is a highly “marked” form of theater. Markedness in linguistics refers to categories of language or cultural material that are stylistically differentiated from the broad class of phenomena to which they belong. They are generally rarer in appearance, and cannot be considered representative of a whole genre. Like other highly stylized traditions of performance, such as Japanese kabuki, or Indian kathakali, opera draws attention not only to the dramatic meanings it conveys, but also to itself as a theatrical form. Because of this marked quality, anything occurring in opera is understood to be theatrical. Thus opera serves as a repository for many of the symbolic conventions that the Western public recognizes as specifically belonging to theatrical expression. As a result, opera is also the bane of theatrical innovators who wish to alter or eliminate the standard conventions of formal theater.
THE INSTITUTIONS OF THEATER AND SPECTACLE

The Unique Qualities of Theater

What fundamentally distinguishes theatrical activity from other kinds of performance activity? Bauman has made several general theoretical statements about the nature of performance. In one seminal article (29a) he includes theater within Singer’s general rubric “cultural performance” (207). Cultural performances “tend to be the most prominent performance contexts within a community” (29a:285). They are scheduled, temporally bounded, spatially bounded, and programmed; they are coordinated public occasions “open to view by an audience and to collective participations” (p. 285). Owing largely to their reflexive nature they are heightened occasions for the community. Although these observations situate theater and spectacle within a general class of performance activities, differentiating them from the general spectrum of performance is still problematic.

The performance literature commonly distinguishes ritual activity from theatrical activity. Here Schechner’s work is of paramount importance. According to Schechner, the difference between ritual and theater cannot be stated in essentialist terms. “Whether one calls a specific performance ‘ritual’ or ‘theater,’” he writes, “depends mostly on context and function. A performance is called theater or ritual because of where it is performed, by whom and under what circumstances” (197:120). Table 1 shows Schechner’s identification of the principal differences between the two forms.

Victor Turner has written two books exploring the relationship between ritual and theatrical genres, From Ritual to Theatre and Back (224) and The Anthropology of Performance (225). In these he builds on his earlier influential work Dramas, Fields and Metaphors (221). Turner separates theater,

Table 1  Ritual and theater compared (after 197:120)

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<td>Theater</td>
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<td>results</td>
<td>fun</td>
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<tr>
<td>link to an absent Other</td>
<td>only for those here</td>
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<td>symbolic time</td>
<td>emphasis now</td>
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<td>performer possessed, in trance</td>
<td>performer knows what s/he’s doing</td>
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<tr>
<td>audience participates</td>
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<td>audience believes</td>
<td>audience appreciates</td>
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<tr>
<td>criticism discouraged</td>
<td>criticism flourishes</td>
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<td>collective creativity</td>
<td>individual creativity</td>
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</table>
ritual, and performative processes in public life. Revolutions, public demonstrations, campaigns, strikes, and other forms of participatory public action all have performative dimensions. Moreover, they share certain features with the fundamental ritual process explicated by Van Gennep (228) and elaborated in Turner’s earlier books (219, 220). Such “social dramas” involve a break with the “normal” structures of ongoing life, the entrance of groups of individuals into liminal transitory states, and the reincorporation of the liminalized individuals into a reconstituted social order. The efficacy/entertainment distinction is a way of separating ritual from theater, but other performance genres also fall under the general functional rubric of entertainment. Both Schechner and Turner find two other crucial features in theater/spectacle that are not necessary in other forms of performance activity (cf 197:12). First, for theater and spectacle an observer/evaluator audience (as opposed to a participatory audience) is always present. Theatrical forms have no purpose without the audience. This is not true for rituals, sports, play activities, games, or face-to-face verbal interaction, despite their theatrical qualities.

Second, theater and spectacle focus principally on symbolic reality. In theater, the performers represent themselves in roles disjunct from their lives outside the performance. The presentational frame for theatrical performance is also disjunct from even the immediate context of the occasion for the performance. Theatrical performance generally makes this separation through a series of conventions such as the raising or lowering of a curtain, changes in lighting levels, or the use of music to announce the beginning or end of a performance. Although experimental and avant-garde theatrical forms may play with the boundaries of separation between observer and performer, in general, theater maintains a framed separation between the “show” and external reality throughout the duration of the performance. In spectacle, performers present themselves as representative of a larger group or a larger reality. Symbolic reality serves to differentiate theater and spectacle from performance genres such as public speaking (e.g. lectures, sermons), exhibitions, and demonstrations.

The use of three descriptive dimensions—efficacy vs entertainment in intent, participation vs observation in the audience’s role, and symbolic representation vs literal self-presentation in the performers’ role—thus permits a rough distinction between theater and spectacle, on the one hand, and other performance forms, on the other. For example, one form of performance that does not qualify as theatrical are the kinds of performance genres Schechner calls “actuals” (197). These are events such as feats of daring or athletic competitions that are viewed by an audience entirely for their own sake. The audience, in an observer’s role, is entertained, but the performers do not engage in symbolic representation in their roles. They are likewise evaluated for their ability to accomplish specific tasks during the performance, rather
than on their overall presentation. For example, a high-jumper may have bad form, but s/he will be considered a success if s/he jumps higher than other contestants. Likewise, although a tight-rope walker may be costumed as an historical figure, the audience remains interested not in realistic portrayal of this character but in the performer’s ability to negotiate the tight-rope.

Despite the characterizing features discussed above, the distinction between theater and spectacle and other performance genres in a given case may be blurry. A conversationalist or public speaker may mimic someone not present during a narrative. A ritual occasion may contain performative events designed primarily for entertainment, rather than for efficacy. A sports event may include theater or spectacle (such as a half-time show at a football game). In all of these examples, however, the theatrical aspect or portion is a secondary enhancement of the primary nontheatrical purpose for which participants are gathered.

**Spectacle**

Spectacle is further differentiated from theater in terms of the expectations of the audience. Like theater, spectacle must have an audience; but unlike theater, according to MacAlloon, “Spectacles give primacy to visual sensory and symbolic codes; they are things to be seen. Hence we refer to circuses as ‘spectacles,’ but not orchestral performances” (167:243). As is the case with theater, a spectator may choose to attend a spectacle; attendance at a ritual may be considered a cultural duty. MacAlloon further points out that spectacles must be “of a certain size and grandeur” (167:243).

Spectacle is a public display of a society’s central meaningful elements. Parades, festivals, and other such events occur at regular intervals and are frequently deeply meaningful for a society. The meaningfulness of a spectacle is usually proportionate to the degree to which the elements displayed to the public seem to represent key elements in the public’s cultural and emotional life. It is almost as if the mere event of displaying these symbolic representative elements in a special framed context is enough to elicit strong positive emotional responses from the observing public. Handelman terms such actions “public events,” most of which are also spectacles (127). In his study of the Palio of Siena (128), he demonstrates how such public events, by means of their structure and enactment, reconstitute the whole community. In essence, the Palio, a horse race around the town square, allows all quarters of the city first to differentiate themselves, since each quarter is represented by a horse and rider, and then to come together in the enactment of the event. Dundes & Falassi (82) have likewise presented an important analysis of this spectacle. DaMattia (70, 71) makes a similar claim for Brazilian carnival—that in essence the carnival tradition is an example of a people reconstituting itself through spectacle. In his study of the Olympic games (167), MacAlloon notes that
“Insofar as there exists, in the Hegelian-Marxian phrase, a ‘world-historical process,’ the Olympics have emerged as its privileged expression and celebration” (167:242). Anthropologists have been slow to take up the study of spectacle. Allegrini (3), Debord (77), Deldime (78), Duvignaud (86, 87), and Falassi (98) have all attempted theoretical analyses of the spectacle as a general social phenomenon. Among specific studies, Bauman (30) has written about the symbolic dynamics present in a folklife festival in Washington, and Gregor (123) has presented a picture of daily life as spectacle in a Brazilian village. Harrison-Pepper (130) presents an insightful analysis of the street performances that take place in Washington Square Park in New York City as representative of the whole surrounding community and its ethos. Kisliuk (153) analyzes the musical behavior taking place at a bluegrass festival, and Lawrence’s study on rodeo (161), Nunley & Bettelheim’s analysis of Caribbean festivals (175), and Taussig’s treatment of the devil in Andean festivals (217) have been mentioned above.

GENRES OF THEATER AND SPECTACLE

Theater exists in a variety of forms worldwide. Anthropologists generally focus on the functions of theater in supporting other cultural institutions such as religion or politics, rather than concentrating on the various theatrical forms per se. Nevertheless, significant work has been done for a number of theater genres. In order to establish rough categories of theater forms, I adopt here a modified communications analysis of the kind suggested by Jakobson (140a) and Hymes (138). We can discuss theater genres in terms of four variables: the media used in presentation, the nature of the performers, the nature of the content of presentation, and the role of the audience. We can also differentiate these forms according to the degree to which they are codified. More highly codified and elaborated forms have generally produced artistic traditions with widely understood execution standards. Less thoroughly codified traditions may be largely improvisatory and exhibit great variation in local performance standards.

Genre Variables

MEDIA

**Music-Text-Dance (MTD) theater** MTD is the commonest form of theater and spectacle worldwide. Music, sung or spoken text, and dance are used to advance a dramatic narrative, or form an integral part of such a narrative. Both elaborate codified and simpler less codified varieties of this universal theater form abound. Examples of highly codified varieties include Euro-American opera/music
theater, Japanese kabuki (61, 96, 162), Iranian ta'ziyeh (33, 66, 117, 160), and Indian kathakali (143, 243). Less thoroughly codified forms include Turkish orta-oyunu (5–7, 9), Japanese kagura (135), and Mexican pastorella (69, 102, 142).

Dance theater While theater involving only dance and music, with little or no spoken or sung text, is rarer than MTD theater, it is still fairly widespread. Euro-American ballet is an example of a highly codified variety. Indian nautunki (129) and Bolivian diablada (217) are examples of less thoroughly codified forms.

Textual theater Theater involving only the spoken word, with no music or dance, is rare on a world scale, even though it is the commonest unmarked form of theater in the West. Western spoken drama is a highly codified form of this kind of theater. Storytelling traditions such as Iranian naqqali (32) or the Rajasthani “jester” (93) are examples of less thoroughly codified forms.

PERFORMERS

Human actors By far the commonest variety of theater is undertaken by human performers presenting themselves before an audience. They may be costumed or in make-up, but they are unmistakably human. Some traditions require that all the performers be of one gender, one age group, or one social class. In Japan, for example, women do not appear as actors in noh (50) or kabuki (61, 96, 162) theater. In Orissa in India the form Radha-prima lila (89) uses only children. In Gujarat, also in India, performers in bhavai (14–16, 173, 174) are all from a single performer caste.

Masked theater The use of masks for performers is virtually universal. Their incidence in theater and spectacle is so widespread that it is reasonable to categorize them separately. Masks cover the face, a portion of the face, or the face and other body parts. The mask can also be seen as a special form of animated object (see below). Indeed, when the mask covers the entire body of the performer, it has become a full-body puppet. Extremely heavy facial or body make-up, such as in kathakali (89, 229, 230, 243) dance drama in southern India, is often seen as a form of nonpermanent mask.

Animated objects The use of animated objects is widespread in theater and spectacle. The general term “puppet,” often applied to these objects, conceals the enormous variety of objects that people regularly manipulate in performance. Shadow puppets are found throughout Eurasia. String puppets come in all sizes and varieties from life-sized varieties to very small forms (3). Rod
puppets vary both in size and in the complexity of their manipulation (173, 174). A complex form, such as used in Japanese *bunraku*, requires three human manipulators. Glove puppets fit on the hand and are manipulated by the fingers of the operator (136a). Ventriloquists' dummies are manipulated directly by the operator without strings or rods. Full-body puppets are worn by the operator(s), who manipulate them from within. Animated stage devices are operated by mechanisms invisible to the audience. In today's theater, these may include various kinds of film, slide, and video projections. We are just beginning to see robot devices manipulated by their operators through the use of remote-control radio.

**Mixed forms**  Masks and animated objects appear along with human performers in some theater forms. These are most often used to portray supernatural beings or animals. Of course, ventriloquism requires the human operator and the dummy to appear together.

**CONTENT**

**Scripted**  Many theatrical forms are scripted or semi-scripted—that is, material is performed as an author intended. Scripted theater exists on a continuum with improvisatory theater (see below). No scripted form—even the most rigidly codified, such as *noh* drama or ballet—is performed without some improvisation on the part of performers.

**Unscripted**  Equally common is the "improvisatory" theatrical form, whose materials are performed without a formal script. This form exists on a continuum with scripted performance. No improvisatory performance ever takes place in the absence of some previously agreed upon framework for improvisation.

**Mixed forms**  Many forms allow for scripted material to alternate with or interpenetrate unscripted material. *Wayang kulit* (67, 68, 103, 147, 213, 214), Javanese shadow puppet drama, is one of many theater forms in which the formal scripted narrative that advances the story being presented alternates with comic interludes of improvisatory material performed by clown figures.

**AUDIENCE ROLE**  As mentioned above, the audience is crucial to theater and spectacle. It is not always necessary for other forms of performance.

Some genres predicate performance on audience familiarity with the material being presented. Although some audience members may not be familiar with the content of the performance, in these genres the performers assume prior familiarity and present their material from that perspective (49, 85, 133).
Audience as participant  In ritual, the audience is a full participant in the event. The active contributions of the audience—vocal display, direct action (dance, movement, eating, entering into trance, etc), and presentation of gifts to deities, priests, or other participants—are essential to the success of the event.

Audience as witness  In some theatrical events, and in most spectacles, the audience must be present to witness the performed events. Although the audience might neither participate actively nor evaluate the performance, it must be present and actively watching for the event to succeed.

Audience as evaluator  In many theatrical events the audience is not only a witness, but also an evaluator of the event. This is most often the case when the performance is repeated for different audiences. The good opinion of the audience is indicative of the success of the event. In genres where the audience is familiar with the material being presented, audience evaluation is predicated on the degree to which performers are able to meet or exceed a standard of artistry in performing specific material that has been established by past generations of expert performers. Examples of these genres include Euro-American opera and ballet (132a, 149, 164, 191, 209), Indian kathakali (89, 229, 230, 243), Chinese opera (169), and Japanese kabuki (61, 96, 162) and noh (50).

In genres where the audience is unfamiliar with the material being presented, evaluation is based on a general appreciation of the ability of the performers to engage and entertain. This appreciation may be based on a general knowledge of the skills needed to carry out the performance—such as skill at declamation, acting, acrobatics, comedy, music, or verbal art.

Interaction of Modes

The characteristics discussed above can help us to distinguish a wide variety of theater genres. For example, the Turkish shadow-puppet form karagöz can be described as MTD theater using animated objects with nonscripted text involving the audience as evaluator (5–9). The Rangda-Barong (27, 44–46) ritual dance drama in Bali can be characterized as dance theater involving a mixture of human beings and animated objects, performing a mixture of scripted and unscripted text among an audience of participants. The recitation of a poem at a ceremonial event such as the investiture of a public official, or an official’s recounting of a culturally significant historical event on a ceremonial occasion such as a religious holiday might be described as a theater form employing human actors to perform scripted text before a witnessing audience.
CULTURAL MEANING IN THEATER AND SPECTACLE

Despite a great deal of study of theater and spectacle genres, the ultimate meaning of this form of activity for human society remains elusive. Several suggestions have been made by anthropologists based on much of the fieldwork cited above.

Dominant theories of the origins of theater posit a religious basis for most theatrical activity. Most elaborate theatrical activity seems concentrated in agricultural societies. This has led some researchers (112a) to suppose a religious origin for theater based on celebration of yearly fertility cycles. Kirby, by contrast, claims that theater arises from shamanism (151).

Turner likewise assumes that much theatrical activity has its ultimate origins in ritual behavior. Religious ritual serves as a model for social ritual—or social dramas (221, 223)—which serve in turn to supply drama with thematic material to present before the public. Turner and Schechner show how such social dramas and staged dramas are interrelated. Figure 1, familiar to performance theorists, diagrams this interrelationship.

Whatever the ultimate meaning of performance, Schechner suggests that it functions through "restoration of behavior" (196, 197a). Unmediated experience in the world is taken by the theatrical performer and, after extensive rehearsal, restored in a theatre frame for the edification of spectators. The theatrical experience is meaningful to the degree that it enables the spectator to feel the force of the original unmediated experience (54:253). For this to occur,
the spectator must collaborate psychologically in the total theatrical event. The performer tries to ensure that this collaboration between performer and spectator is maintained throughout the performance. The supportive mechanisms of theater and spectacle—the costumes, lights, language, music, and motion—not only fulfill the poetic function posited by Jakobson; they also fulfill a phatic function (140a). The phatic function in Jakobson’s analysis of communication is the aspect of interaction that keeps all parties engaged with each other during the duration of communication. Theater does even more than engage participants and spectators in the immediate context of the theatrical event. It evokes and solidifies a network of social and cognitive relationships existing in a triangular relationship between performer, spectator, and the world at large. The phatic connection is fragile, and constantly shifting. Therefore no single experience of theater or spectacle is ever exactly like any other. This indeterminacy is part of what makes theater and spectacle forever intriguing.

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