

Editors' Introduction

From postmodern dance and hip hop to world's fairs and trial lawyers' oratory, from staged dramas to spirit possession, election campaigns, political rallies, and Halloween parades, from *butoh* and vaudeville to capoeira, Olympic events, and memorial commemorations: the analytic category of "performance" offers scholars, artists, and cultural activists an object of study, a method of analysis, as well as a living art form—something to be experienced, practiced, enacted. Since the 1980s the terms *performance*, *performative*, and *performativity* have been used in various academic departments—from speech and communication, theater, art history, anthropology, and history to their namesake, performance studies—as organizing concepts for studying a wide range of behaviors and situations in areas ranging from museum exhibitions and cookbooks to landscapes and the aesthetics of everyday life. As a theoretical lens, performance offers scholars an analytical framework that acknowledges the deeply nonessentialist and unfixed nature of gender, race, social class, and sexuality, allowing them to probe those categories in ways unavailable to other modes of analysis. Interdisciplinary by definition, performance analysis integrates tools and research methods from multiple disciplines and fields and has been instrumental in the burgeoning academic arenas of queer studies, postcolonial studies, and feminist theory.

We intentionally defined this issue of *Radical History Review*, "Performance, Politics, and History," in broad terms in the hope of accessing an expanding body of interdisciplinary scholarship drawing on performance analysis. The material offered ranges widely over space, time, subject, and discipline: Truth commissions in Peru and exhibitions in Atlanta; civic space and narratives of economic development in Lowell, Massachusetts, and Shanghai; music hall performers in early nineteenth-century Paris, nineteenth-century anarchists, Johnny Cash, Chris Burden, and the *New York Times*.

Radical History Review

Issue 98 (Spring 2007) DOI 10.1215/01636545-2006-024

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The overarching focus, however, is on the interface of politics and performance. It was our intention to explore sites of performance as a way to expand our understanding of the past through the ways politics were explicitly or implicitly expressed through performative strategies. As we will see in the following articles, reflections, and “performances,” scholars working with these analytical tools seek to open and broaden the definition of performance, as well as to illuminate the historical moments in which they occur: to both explore the relationship between performance practices and politics and test the ground on which they rest.

—Sally Charnow and Eliza Jane Reilly