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The Performance Hypothesis
Practicing Emotions in Protected Frames

William O. Beeman

The Performance Hypothesis

If man is a sapient animal, a toolmaking animal, a self-making animal, a symbol-using animal, he is, no less, a performing animal, *Homo performans,* not in the sense, perhaps that a circus animal may be a performing animal, but in the sense that a man is a self-performing animal—his performances are, in a way, *reflexive,* in performing he reveals himself to himself. This can be in two ways: the actor may come to know himself better through acting or enactment; or one set of human beings may come to know themselves better through observing and/or participating in performances generated and presented by another set of human beings.

Victor Turner

Introduction: Performance and Its Purpose in Human Life

I was once singing in a production of Puccini's *La Bohème.* In the fourth act, the heroine, Mimi, dies of consumption. The last notes of the opera are delivered by her lover, the tenor Rudolfo, who bends over her lifeless body and sobs while singing her name four times on a high G. The effect is universally the same for the all audiences. Almost as if a button were pushed, the scene triggers an autonomic response. Grown men and women weep openly. There is rarely a dry eye in the house. During one rehearsal for this production, our director had a problem with the soprano portraying Mimi. 'My dear,' he said, 'you cannot cry when Rudolfo sings your name. You are already dead.' 'I know!' she wailed, 'but I can't help it. It's SO SAD!'[1]

It is events like this that point up the unique ability of performance to affect the cognitive and emotional[2] state of its audience. Determining the reasons why it does so is much more difficult. Human beings in every culture are so extraordinarily engaged with performance. Not only do they enjoy it immensely, they also expend

an amazing amount of energy and material resources to arrange for it to happen, and for them to see it. Moreover, they never seem to tire of it. Specific performance experiences are revisited repeatedly—sometimes thousands of times over a lifetime, with no decrease in engagement or enthusiasm. Why this should be so defies logic, and cries out for an explanation.[3]

The two broad questions that I hope to elucidate are, then: 'Why do humans engage in performance activity?' and 'How does performance achieve its effects?'

In the last twenty years or so, astonishing advances have taken place along two fronts in the understanding of the human mind. The first of these developments is the progress made in understanding the neural structures that underlie the reception and generation of affective states in human beings. Work by several remarkable teams of scientists in England and the United States have moved toward resolving some age-old questions about the relationship between autonomic reactions in humans and the identification of those responses as 'emotion'. Whereas much of this work remains somewhat hypothetical, it has proved convincing enough to allow me to formulate an hypothesis about the evolutionary value of performance.

A second development has been advances in the philosophical and psychological problem known as 'Theory of Mind.' This refers to the ability of humans to understand (or to believe that they understand) the feelings and motivations of others—literally a theory that humans develop about the states of minds of people they deal with in social life. If humans do not have a Theory of Mind, they can neither perform for others with the hope of affecting their state of mind, nor can they become an audience for performance, understanding what they are seeing and hearing.

Eight Basic Concepts

It is important to begin this discussion with some clear working concepts about performance and its properties.[4] Unless otherwise specified, when I say 'performer', this term can interchangeably refer to one person, or many persons acting collectively (as an orchestra or dance troupe). When I say 'audience' this can interchangeably refer to a collective group of people or a single individual.[5]

Performance is Purposeful Enactment or Display Behaviour Carried out in Front of an Audience

Enactment and display are the basic materials of performance. This form of behaviour is one that humans share with probably every vertebrate animal species. The difference between mere display and enactment in fish, birds or mammals and performance is its purposefulness. The male peacock spreading his tail is genetically programmed to do so under specific circumstances. How *well* he is able to do it may make a difference in his life, but his behaviour is instinctual.

Humans, by contrast, are not only aware of their performative behaviour, they generally know for what purpose they are doing it, and they know clearly for whom they are doing it and why. I grant that some human performance we see every day is behaviour on autopilot. In these cases, however, it is rarely effective. Part of the purpose of performance, as I have already mentioned, is to change the cognitive states of others. Therefore a near-autonomic, zombie-like enactment or display comes close to lacking purposefulness, and therefore is, I would argue, barely performance.

It is the breadth of this definition that allows me to discuss used-car salesmen, speechmaking politicians, persons engaged in ordinary conversation, clever sycophantic social climbers, Olympic gymnasts, flamenco dancers, Kabuki actors and opera singers under the same rubric.

Performance Aims to Change the Cognitive State of Participants

I reiterate this point, stated earlier, because it is so essential. There is no reason for performance to endure as a human activity if the possibility of affecting an audience is not present.

It is important to add a dimension to this requirement, however. To change the cognitive state of the audience involves a whole range of consequences. First and foremost is the phatic dimension of engagement. The audience by *being* an audience undergoes a changed cognitive state. They are engaged in 'framed behaviour' with the performer, in which every communicative element of the event becomes performatively significant. Entering this state is largely a choice on the part of the audience, although the performer may try to influence that choice with a variety of enticements. These generally involve promises of benefits for the audience (social approbation, enjoyment, gain, safety, comfort), or promises of prophylaxis against unpleasant consequences (social sanctions, unhappiness, loss, danger, discomfort).

Second, audience members are subject to experiencing altered emotional states that they would not otherwise have, were they not engaged in a performance event. This does not mean that they will always have an emotional experience in performance, only that the performance event primes them for that possibility.[6]

Third, they are subject to experiencing altered dispositions to behaviour through performance. Whether they act on those dispositions involves a more complex set of personal decisions. The performer may wish to have the audience engaged in all sorts of behaviour—laughing, weeping, buying something, going to bed with them, fighting with them, etc. The cognitive disposition to this behaviour must precede the action, however.

Performance is an accomplishment. Through performance an audience is moved and transformed. They are made to laugh, to cry, to change their opinions, to take social action, to be surprised, to question their existence, to acquire a feeling of well-being and integration.

Some Performers are More Effective in this than Others

Even with all the desire in the world, however, some performers are ineffective. Because performance is an achievement, there is a degree of skill involved in it that differentiates members of society. This is why performance is virtually always extensively practiced before it takes place. This is as true for an opera diva preparing a role as for a stuttering swain trying to find the right words and bodily attitude to propose marriage successfully.

Language helps performers tremendously. It is the principal tool humans use to affect others. It is powerfully instrumental, having the power to transform human existence directly as Austin and Searle have shown, and as I have argued in previous writings (Beeman 1986). However, language alone is often not enough to guarantee success in performance. Physical movement, personal adornment, arrangements of the environment, music and every other conceivable human activity can be transformed and brought to bear in performance. Because curiosity and love of novelty are primal human behavioural traits, creativity and innovation are powerful tools in performance. Through them audiences are attracted, engaged and encouraged to participate in the performance process.

Ultimately, then, every performer creates a 'unique synthesis of contextual and textual realms (Briggs 1988: 357; cf. Beeman 1986). The creation of an effective performance involves a calculus that includes taking account of past performances and their effects, the immediate performance situation, and the available repertoire of performance materials, harnessed to serve a particular goal.

Performance is Collaborative Behaviour

Both the performers and the audience participate in reinforced feedback, which I will term *the performance loop.* Performers attempt to change the state of consciousness of the audience; the audience evaluates the actions of the performers and manifests its own behavioural display. The actions of the performer are thereby affected and changed. One of the most important factors in the audience–performer connection is the regulation of *attention.* Schechner (1977) has dealt with this in an important essay on *selective inattentiveness,* emphasizing the fact that the audience directs attention to one or another aspect of performance as it is ongoing.[7] The performer likewise does his or her best to direct the audience to attend to specific aspects of the performance. An extreme example of this is the magician whose performative task is to direct the audience *away* from that which they are not supposed to see.[8]

Not all performers are in direct contact with their audience. Some enactment and display is done for the benefit of people who will not see it immediately. Artistic products may be thought of as 'frozen performance' by this formulation. Novels,

sculptures, paintings, films and photographs are designed to change cognitive states of their consumers, but over time, and over diffuse space. The collaboration between performer and audience is nevertheless established when the art object is viewed.

It is for this reason that in the modern age performers and those responsible for marketing performance are continually trying both to identify audiences and to monitor them. New magazines, books and television shows all have demographic profiles that predict specific groups of consumers for these products. Much effort is made to 'reach' these people and alert them to the fact that they *are* the audience for these communications. Then, since it is not possible in these instances for the performer to obtain an immediate reaction, the audience is surveyed independently to determine the effects of the performance, thus closing the feedback loop.

Performance is Iterative, Ongoing, and Ultimately Unpredictable in its Results

Performance is 'emergent', in Richard Bauman's terms (1977). Because it is cocreated, the results always depend dynamically on the behavioural dispositions of the participants. The results of any given instance of performance are therefore unpredictable.

Any performer knows this unpredictability well. A politician does not realize that his audience is full of beekeepers and makes a disparaging remark about apiaries, getting an unanticipated negative reaction. A salesman inadvertently wears a particular cologne that reminds his customer of her father and predisposes her to a sale. The audience for a theatrical comedy consists largely of a theatre party from a particular industrial plant where hundreds of people were laid off the previous afternoon, and nothing can make them laugh, to the surprised dismay of the performers. (All of the above are true stories.)

Performance takes Place within Culturally Defined Cognitive Frames that have Identifiable Boundaries

The concept of the cognitive 'frame' is one of the most durable and useful in social science. The concept refers to the ability of human beings (and other higher animal species) to collaboratively 'bracket off' a spate of behaviour from the ongoing stream of social life for special treatment. Special rules for behaviour exist within the 'frame' to which participants adhere for its temporal and spatial duration. Examples of framed behaviour include games (cf. Caillois 1979), play sequences, ceremonies, rituals and sporting events (cf. MacAloon 1984). Multiple framing is common in human life. Frames within frames, overlapping frames, ongoing frames, and interrupted frames are some of the variants that researchers have analyzed over the years.

The frame concept has a long pedigree, going back in some respects to Hume and Heidegger. In recent times Alfred Schuetz is often credited with an important formulation of the notion in his influential essay 'On Multiple Realities' (1945). Equally important are Gregory Bateson's work on 'play' (1955), Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (1974) and Deborah Tannen's *Framing in Conversational Structures* (1993). For those who may be unfamiliar with the concept, I give a brief sketch of framed behaviour here.

The minimal performance frame is one in which an agreement exists between an audience and a performer whereby the audience will attend to the enactment and display behaviour of the performer. This frame can be as fleeting as an encounter between a passer-by and a street musician, or as elaborate as a lifelong role as a participant in the palace ritual of a royal court (cf. Geertz's *Negara* 1980).

Frames may arise spontaneously or be invoked through linguistic interchange ('Let's pretend you're the patient and I'm the doctor'). Many are predetermined through culturally specified custom. 'Toasting' at a Russian dinner is a fine, structured performance frame with a master of ceremonies, a protocol of toasting order, and expected drinking behaviour. That the frame holds even after everyone becomes very drunk is a tribute to its strength. 'Going to the theatre' in today's Western society is clearly framed behaviour, where audience members must refrain from loud noise and excessive movement at certain times and are allowed to make quite a lot of noise and move about at other times. Added to this is the framed behaviour of the actors, who themselves must deal with at least two cognitive frames, 'on stage' and 'off stage.' Their behaviour is, of course, markedly different in these two settings. Some very complicated framings occur when playwrights and directors begin to experiment artistically with the frames in the theatre. Some examples are 'Breaking the fourth wall' (Pirandello, Thornton Wilder) and engaging or involving the audience in the action of the performance, establishing 'plays within a play' (*Pagliacci, Midsummer Night's Dream*) or exposing the offstage area to the view of the audience (cf. Schechner 1973).

The Most Effective Performances are Those in Which the Performers and Audience Achieve Full Engagement with the Performance Activity through 'Flow'

Goffman wrote in his classic work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959)'

> When an individual becomes engaged in an activity, whether shared or not, it is possible for him to become caught up by it, carried away by it, engrossed in it—to be, as we say, spontaneously involved in it. He finds it psychologically unnecessary to refrain from dwelling on it and psychologically unnecessary to dwell on anything else. A visual and

> cognitive engrossment occurs, with an honest unawareness of matters other than the activity. (p. 38)

The psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi discussed this concept in two important books, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (1975) and the more popular *Flow* (1990). Flow is in fact the term that he uses to label the engagement experience Goffman mentions. According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow takes place when a person is engaged in an activity that is sufficiently challenging that they do not become bored, and sufficiently comfortable that they do not become anxious.

In daily life one typically 'rehearses' difficult tasks until they become routinized enough in the body so as to not require active attention to the physical details of executing them. This echoes Bourdieu's (1997) notion of *habitus.*

An experience of flow can take place outside of performative activity. Common examples are the loss of attention to the body one experiences when driving a car over familiar territory (Wallace 1965), or in achieving meditative states. Sports activity often results in flow. It may be that trance states are the result of a particularly strong sense of flow.

I would contend, along with Turner (1982: 55–58) that effective performance also involves a concomitant ability to enter 'flow'—to make that activity appear effortless and natural. The sense of 'truth' created during a performative activity is established on this bedrock. This is as essential for the most commonplace incidents of performance, such as when individuals are engaged in face-to-face interaction, as it is for highly structured, conscious performance, such as for stage actors, dancers and other entertainers.

Naturally a performer's ability to induce a feeling of flow in an audience is an exceptionally valuable skill. Audience members want to be carried along by the performance, since the flow experience is one of the most enjoyable of human feelings. I remarked to a theatre critic of my acquaintance that I thought he had a great job—being paid to go to the theatre. His reply was a derisive laugh, and the observation that when he was 'working' he never enjoyed a minute of his theatre experience, because he could never surrender to the action on stage. He was prevented from entering flow by the need to continually observe and make critical notes on the performance.

Performance has Broad Evolutionary Value for Human Beings

Many of the preceding points have been widely discussed by me in other works (Beeman 1986, 1993) and by other authors, but the study of the biological basis for performance is in its infancy. I note the exceptional pioneering work of d'Aquili, Laughlin, and McMannus (1979) and Lex (1979) in dealing with altered cognitive states[9] in ritual.

The argument depends on two important aspects of human behaviour: the function of emotion in decision making, and the importance of 'theory of mind' in human interaction, both of which, I maintain, are essential for human survival. Performance, I hypothesize, plays a crucial role in the maintenance of these two vital human bio-behavioural routines.

The Evolutionary Value of Performance

The Nature and Function of Emotion

Performers change the cognitive state of their audience in two principal ways. The first way is by arousing an emotional response. The second, by changing a disposition to action. These two responses are related, but I want to spend some time describing them. In particular, to reach my conclusion I need to review some recent developments in the investigation of emotion by psychologists and neurophysiologists.

Our view of emotions has changed tremendously in recent times. The Greeks referred to them as *pathe*—sufferings. It didn't matter whether it was love, anger or greed; these forces had to be countered and conquered by mastery of will to achieve wisdom and a balanced life. Romans translated *pathe* with several terms. One of them was *passiones,* from which we get the English word 'passion,' and from then on, the description of these emotional terms became a huge collection of imprecise metaphors—happy coming from *hap* meaning luck, glad from *glat,* meaning smooth or bright, and so on.

As philosopher Jonathan Ree notes in a recent review of several books on emotion:

> Then there was the rise of scientific medicine. If our bodily infections could be brought within the scope of physical laws, then perhaps our mental affections could as well. The word 'emotion' (which originally referred to civil unrest) was recruited to the cause of science and, with a little help from Charles Darwin and William James, pathe became a theme for physiologists and psychologists rather than moral philosophers. (Ree 2000: 1)

What is notable about the Greek and Roman formulations of what we today identify as emotion is the clear separation between the bodily sensations of emotion and awareness of them.

Today it often seems that individuals are powerless in the face of their emotions. When these sensations arise in an uncontrolled manner, one needs some medicament to quell the fires.

William James and indeed Freud slightly before him had a somewhat Greek notion about the nature of these emotions. In his article 'What Is an Emotion' (1884) James starts with a stimulus and ends with a feeling. In between is some kind of bodily

response. The precise physiological mechanism that operates in the gap between initial stimulus and recognition of a feeling or emotion is still being debated and investigated. However, researchers in the field of emotion now recognize that, in Joseph LeDoux' words: 'emotions are things that happen to us rather than things we will to occur' (LeDoux 1996: 19).

LeDoux goes on to point out that:

> [O]nce emotions occur they become powerful motivators of future behaviors. They chart the course of moment-to-moment action as well as set the sails toward long-term achievements. But our emotions can also get us into trouble. When fear becomes anxiety, desire gives way to greed, or annoyance turns to anger, anger to hatred, friendship to envy, love to obsession, or pleasure to addiction, our emotions start working against us. Mental health is maintained by emotional hygiene, and mental problems to a large extent reflect the breakdown of emotional order. Emotions can have useful and pathological consequences. (LeDoux 1996: 19–20)

LeDoux (1996: 162–65) has demonstrated fairly conclusively that the generation of *fear* proceeds from outside stimulus—particularly auditory stimulus. Most of the action seems to take place in and around a central area of the brain, close to the juncture of the two hemispheres, and the prefrontal cortex. Much of the 'routing' of information takes place in this region. There are three bodies in particular that seem to have particularly important roles in the experience of emotion—the amygdala, the hippocampus and the thalamus. Signals pass through the auditory pathway to the thalamus (which relays information) in the lower forebrain and thence to the dorsal amygdala (which evaluates information). The hippocampus has a number of functions, but one seems to be the regulation of working memory.

Emotion activated by way of the thalamo-amygdala (subcortical) pathway results from rapid, minimal, automatic, evaluative processing. Emotion activated in this way need not involve the neocortex. Emotion activated by discrimination of stimulus features, thoughts, or memories requires that the information pass from the thalamus to the neocortex and then to the amygdala. LeDoux believes this to be the neural basis for cognitive appraisal and evaluation of events. These two routes—the direct route from the thalamus to the amygdala, and the thalamus-neocortex-amygdala route are termed the 'low road' and the 'high road' by LeDoux (1996: 164).

Researchers Ralph Adolphs, Antoine Bechara, Antonio Damasio, Hanna Damasio, Daniel Tranel and others in their research team at the University of Iowa have made exciting strides toward understanding both the mechanisms of the production of emotion, and the functionality of emotion in human life. Anthony Damasio has emerged as a public spokesman for this research group in two important semi-popular treatments of their research results*, Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (1994), and *The Feeling of What Happens, Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (1999).

As is typical with neurophysiologists, this group of researchers have hypothesized the functions of emotion through a study of pathology. It appears that a small nexus in the prefrontal cortex, the *amygdala,*[10] is the centre of a complex system whereby emotional stimulus is first evaluated, and then an appropriate emotional response is generated. Adolphs describes it simply:

> The amygdala plays an important role in emotion and social behavior. Its principal function appears to be the linking of perceptual representations to cognition and behavior on the basis of the emotional or social value of the stimuli. (Adolphs 2001: 232)

Individuals with damage to the amygdala, and surrounding ventromedial prefrontal cortex—the area of the brain right above the eyes—can perform well on intelligence-quotient and memory tests. However, these same individuals, when faced with real-life decisions, hesitate, equivocate, then make unwise choices. The same patients also display little emotion. The team wondered if emotional—rather than factual—memories might be missing.

They performed several gambling experiments with these individuals on the theory that gambling involves both rational decision making and emotional involvement (Bechara and Damasio 1997; see also Adolphs 1999). The individuals with damage to the prefrontal regions were hopeless losers in the games, even when the best strategies were revealed to them. The team's stated hypothesis is that rational decision making is dependent upon emotion. And emotion arises when an individual is neurologically capable of making a connection between *past experience* and *immediate experience.*

These developments are exciting particularly for those who have had some experience with pragmatic philosophy. Consider the famous statement made by the pragmatic philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce in his now classic article: 'How to Make our Ideas Clear':

> Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object (Peirce 1878).[11]

Damasio and company first posit that emotion 'is the combination of a *mental evaluative process,* simple or complex, with *dispositional responses to that process,* mostly *toward the body proper,* resulting in an emotional body state, but also *toward the brain itself,* resulting in mental changes (Damasio 1994: 139; see also Damasio et al. 2000).'

Next, they hypothesize that emotions are necessary for rational decision making. Individuals encounter new experience, and rather than carefully evaluating every aspect of this experience, they make decisions about future action based on emotional reactions—'gut reactions' if one will—to those experiences. This is termed

the 'somatic marker hypothesis' (Damasio 1994: 165–222). The 'somatic markers', based on past experience, serve as filters for evaluating new experience. Presumably the somatic markers are linked with new sensory input through the thalamus-amygdala mechanism in the brain—a neurophysiological verification of Peirce's pragmatic formulation of 1878.

One other factor regarding emotion is important for this discussion. This is the concept of 'emotional contagion'. This refers to the tendency of humans when exposed to facial expressions and bodily reactions of others exhibiting an emotion to themselves manifest the same bodily reactions. Paul Ekman has investigated this phenomenon extensively[12] and Damasio and company deal extensively with this phenomenon in evaluating their patients. Those with damage to the pre-frontal portions of the brain do not exhibit this characteristic.[13]

Theory of Mind

I introduced the concept of Theory of Mind earlier and suggested that it was an essential human behavioural routine. The capacity to know or guess what others are thinking or feeling is crucial in human decision making. The pioneer in this line of research, George Herbert Mead, is rarely cited in contemporary studies of Theory of Mind.

Many of Mead's concepts, crucial for understanding of social behaviour, seem to have been forgotten by today's researchers. I provide here a brief synopsis of some of his central concepts crucial to this discussion.

Fundamental to Mead's (1934: 18) thinking is the notion that the 'mind' arises in social interaction. Although brains are essential for the development of mind, mind is essentially and fundamentally social. Indeed, for Mead there can be no mind at all without an interactive social environment.

> In defending a social theory of mind we are defending a functional, as opposed to any form of substantive or entitative, view as to its nature. And in particular we are opposing all intra-cranial or intra-epidermal views as to its character and locus. For it follows from our social theory of mind that the field of mind must be co-extensive with, and include all the components of, the field of the social process, or experience and behavior: i.e. the matrix of social relations and interactions among individuals, which is presupposed by it, and out of which it arises or comes into being. If mind is socially constituted, then the field, or locus of any given individual mind must extend as far as the social activity or apparatus of social relations which constitutes it, extends; and hence that field cannot be bounded by the skin of the organism to which it belongs. (Mead 1934: 223)

A second crucial element in Mead's formulation involves the view that incipient action is, neurophysiologically, a completed action. He illustrates this in a celebrated passage:

> There is an organization of the various parts of the nervous system that are going to be responsible for acts, an organization that represents not only that which is immediately taking place but also the stages that are about to take place. If one approaches a distant object, he approaches it with reference to what he is going to do when he arrives there. If he approaches a hammer, he is muscularly ready to seize the handle of the hammer. The latter stages of the act are present in the early stages—not simply in the sense that they are ready to go off, but in the sense that they serve to control the process itself. They determine how we are going to control the object, and the steps in our early manipulation of it (Mead 1934: 11).

This prefigures the formulations of Damasio and LeDoux about the functioning of emotions. Attitudes and feelings about actions must be concomitants of those actions. The total act of picking up the hammer is a melding of present stimulus with past experience (routed through the amygdala). If Damasio is correct, Mead's total act has an emotional component governing its execution.

The second notion promulgated by Mead is an outgrowth of the first. This is that humans not only engage in physical actions, but also in verbal actions. This question was explored philosophically by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1979, 1982, 1983) in their development of speech act theory later in the century. For Mead (1934: 131), verbal action became concretized in the *vocal gesture* which eventually may concretize into a 'significant symbol'. Thus in the development of language, Mead sees incipient action in every utterance.

The most crucial concept for understanding the notion of the Theory of Mind, however, comes from Mead's development of the concept of the 'generalized other'. For Mead, social action was impossible without the ability to posit and predict the actions of others, indeed, to experience the effects of one's actions on others in one's self. The individual in Mead's formulation is both subject and object in social encounters. What one does to others one does to one's self and meaning[14]

> ... arises in experience through the individual stimulating himself to take the action of the other in his reaction toward the object. Meaning is that which can be indicated to others while it is by the same process indicated to the indicating individual (Mead 1934: 89).

To summarize, the mind is by its nature collective, and individuals engaging in action in social space conceive of that action as complete from the very moment of their conception of the action. Verbal gestures have the force of action, and concretize into symbols. The meaning of any action, whether employing an object or a verbal gesture, inheres in the individual's knowledge of the effects of the action on others and the simultaneous knowledge of the effects of the action on him- or herself.

Theory of Mind (TOM) researchers are still puzzling over the mechanisms of the dynamic relationship posited by Mead.[15] In trying to understand how individuals come to an understanding of how other individuals feel and are likely to act, most

do not follow his notion of the social mind; they still are looking for connections between two separate minds. The two dominant theories are simulation-theory, which is close to Mead's formulation, in that it assumes that

> one first recognizes one's own mental states under actual or imagined conditions and then infers on the basis of an assumed similarity or analogy, that the person simulated is in similar states. (Gordon 1996: 14)[16]

This is one of two simulation theory scenarios posited by Gordon, one of the leading proponents of this approach. The other formulation, which he prefers (1996: 15), emphasizes *imaginative transformation* of the individual into the other using one's motivational and emotional resources combined with practical reasoning.

> Theory-theory by contrast assumes that individuals are figuring out each others' motives, emotional states, and actions through a kind of mental calculation—a 'set of rules of symbol manipulation embodied, like a Chomskian universal grammar, in an innate module.' (Gordon 1996: 11)

To be fair, Gordon is an opponent of theory-theory, and therefore characterizes it somewhat narrowly. As one leading *proponent* of this theory, Carruthers, puts it:

> [O]ur understanding of mentalistic notions—of belief, desire, perception, intention and the rest—is largely given by the positions those notions occupy within a folk-psychological theory[17] of the structure and functioning of the mind. (Carruthers 1996: 22)

The debate rages on the merits of these formulations, but at this reading I am inclined to side with the simulation theorists, and George Herbert Mead. I do so because these proposals seem much more clearly in line with the earlier cited work on the generation of emotions. If emotional reactions arise as 'gut reactions' to external stimuli, there must be a large degree of autonomic response in the exercise of Theory of Mind. A solution depending entirely on rational processes seems not to be supported by current data.[18] Simulation-theory also accords more closely with the clinical work that most engages Theory of Mind researchers, namely studies of autism. It seems that autistic individuals lack the capacity to exhibit Theory of Mind (Carruthers and Smith 1996: 6). They also have difficulty perceiving and exhibiting emotion, making them seem close in their cognitive situation to the prefrontal brain-damaged individuals studied by Bechara, Damasio, Damasio, Tranel and their team.

Recent theoretical approaches to the study of autism suggest that the amygdala and related regions are crucial in generating Theory of Mind. Researchers such as Brothers go so far as to call this region of the mind the 'social brain' (Brothers 1990). The 'amygdala theory of autism' was put forward by a group of researchers at Cambridge University and has strong currency (Baron-Cohen et al. 2000).

Theory of Mind has also been raised as a question in one of the most fundamental anthropological problems, namely, the determination of the division between human and nonhuman animal species. Premack and Woodruff (1978), primate behavioural specialists, asked the question: 'Does the chimpanzee have a Theory of Mind?' and set many researchers on a search for an answer. Their question has not yet been answered definitively, but it points up the importance of the notion of a Theory of Mind as a defining human characteristic.[19] And for purposes of the set of problems I am exploring, the question itself is crucial.

To sum up, Theory of Mind represents a basic human capacity to understand and predict the mental states of others. Although a variety of theories abound to explain the mechanism of how this occurs, the brute fact of its existence seems not to be in question. This capacity is essential for the function of performance.

The Performance Hypothesis

I now wish to return to the two questions with which I started this discussion. To repeat: 'Why do humans engage in performance activity?' and 'How does performance achieve its effects?' I believe I can now state a tentative hypothesis concerning the first question. I will return to the second question later.

Performance is the arena of activity that allows humans to practice the display and reception of emotional states and the social transformation of individuals in a protected 'framed' environment. It has evolutionary value because accurate emotional sensitivity and socially sanctioned transformation are necessary for human survival. Its practice is psychologically reinforced; it is inherently enjoyable for both performer and audience.

I will now break this statement down into separate points and take each in turn, discussing their ramifications.

Performance is the Arena of Activity that Allows Humans to Practice the Display and Reception of Emotional States in a Protected 'Framed' Environment. In formulating this hypothesis, I am accepting the hypothesis reflected in the collective work of Adolphs, Bechara, A. Damasio, H. Damasio and Tranel as referenced in several papers by those authors earlier in this discussion, that emotional acuity is necessary for rational decision making. This alone would make any behavioural routine that would hone these skills valuable for human existence.

The warning from the Greeks down to LeDoux of both the positive and the negative aspects of emotion is the point at which anthropological analysis can enter the discussion of the function of emotion and performance. Assuming Damasio and company are right, then the capacity for emotion and the linkage of somatic markers to ongoing experience is essential for human decision making. One difficulty for human beings is that experience in confronting and practicing emotional states is

hard to come by without subjecting oneself to danger. Therefore a protected arena in which one can be brought to feel love, fear, anger, despair, hilarity and other emotions both subtle and extreme is of high value. It is a safe practice arena.

Performance Facilitates the Social Transformation of Individuals in a Protected Environment. However, performance does much more than provide for emotional practice. It is also an arena of activity where individuals can undergo transformation. Performance is the behavioural routine that humans use to persuade, cajole, enlist support, solicit friendship and life partners, calm disturbed individuals and groups, treat behavioural disorders, delight others and present themselves to others. Performance achieves this by fostering the active collaborative engagement of performer and audience mentioned in the second section of this chapter. The audience willingly engages with the performer in the performance frame with the expectation of emerging from that frame in a different state than at the frame's inception.[20] Because performance is framed, it always protects the audience, since they can break the frame and leave if they are unhappy with the course of events.[21]

I view ritual and ceremony as the most serious form of performance, because the consequences for participants result in real and permanent changes to the human condition. The audience witnesses the transformation of the performers into something permanently different. The bride and groom can't walk out of their wedding like they walk out of the theatre, and slough off all that happened in the ceremony.[22]

Performance Has Evolutionary Value Because Accurate Emotional Sensitivity and Socially Sanctioned Transformation Are Necessary for Human Survival. Performance is one of the most sophisticated of human cultural activities. Therefore it is paradoxical that it may derive its power to engender emotional response from affective expressive urges that predate human emergence as homo sapiens. Yet, the ability to perform and react to performance may be one of the most uniquely human things we are able to do as a species.

Here we may question the link between expressive behaviour and performance. In the Pamir region of Central Asia there is a vocal musical form called *falak.* It is recognized as a distinct musical genre, but it is essentially seen as an artistic outpouring of emotion. It is very powerful for the hearer—a quality in popular Western music one calls 'edgy'. It can be carried out without an audience in the open air on a mountainside as well as in a closed room with a formal audience. It may be a lament, or an exuberant outpouring. Urban (1988), Feld (1982), and Wilce (1998a, 1998b) maintain that laments are at once personal expressions of grief and performative acts that demonstrate social and cultural solidarity. The Pamiri *falak* has some of the same quality but is cast within an artistic frame. This reinforces the idea that some of the emotional power in performance may be due to intersubjective

emulation. The artist seems to be engaged in expressing emotion, and the audience is affected empathetically by the performance. This phenomenon is also seen in the powerful *ta'ziyeh* performances in Iran and other Shi'a Muslim countries. These epic theatrical depictions of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, grandson of the prophet Muhammad, are designed to induce weeping and mourning in spectators (cf. Beeman 1979, 1981). As I will show later, vocal acoustic expression emulating emotion is one of the most powerful dimensions of performance.

Delineating those behavioural capacities which are uniquely human has been a venerable task for students of human biology and culture for most of this century. For a long time, tool making and linguistic communication were presented as the two activities that were the sole purview of humans.

In the last two decades, we have learned much more about the behavioural and cognitive capacities of other animal species, particularly our nearest species cousins, the great apes. The research of Jane Goodall and Sue Savage Rumbaugh among others has shown us that they have the capacity both for tool making and linguistic communication. Although the scientific community continues to split hairs evaluating the details, it is clear that human uniqueness is no longer defined unequivocally by these capacities. If we wish to understand human uniqueness, we may need to look to behavioural capacities that are still more complex than language and tool making. Performance is one of these capacities, as I have argued.

One of the principal functions of expressive behaviour would seem to be to encourage and facilitate bonding within human groups on a large scale. Over time, this leads to more effective social organization.

Language itself is good at communicating information, but it is deficient in conveying affective states to others. Humans are able to accomplish a great deal of affective communication through the use of tropes, such as metaphor, but even these structures lack immediacy. When humans really want to express interpersonal affect, language often breaks down. The deepest emotional expressions between two people, even hostile and violent ones, are usually tactile (perhaps also olfactory and gustatory) rather than linguistic, and this physical contact usually is a central component of bonding between individuals.

How do whole groups achieve bonding through sharing of inner states? Most human societies find orgiastic behaviour unpalatable or impractical. It is also problematic in terms of social organization. Untrammeled tactile intimacy leads to social disturbance due to another factor in human social behaviour: the need to establish hierarchies and the related competition for exclusive sexual partners.

One solution has been extensively explored by Victor Turner in a wide number of publications. Drawing on the classic work of Arnold Van Gennep (1960), Turner points out that performance frames allow members of society the freedom to suspend the normal structures of social life and enter into alternative 'subjunctive' structures. One feature of this can be a feeling of *communitas,* a state where members of society feel uniquely connected to each other. Reversals and other transformations of the

social order are also possible. This is not only good for the individuals, but for the survival of society itself:

> [A]ny society which hopes to be imperishable must whittle out for itself a piece of space and a while of time, in which it can look honestly at itself. The supreme honesty of the creative artist who, in his presentations on the stage, in the book, on canvas, in marble, in music, or in towers and houses, reserves to himself the privilege of seeing straight what all cultures build crooked. (Turner 1986: 122)

Auditory and visual channels for communication have the advantage of being able to encompass and affect large numbers of individuals without the need to touch, smell or taste every other person in the group. Normal language is of course primarily conveyed through auditory and visual channels. It is then not surprising that forms of communication conveying affect in an immediate manner have language as a component but provide significant enhancements from other dimensions of communication.

To sum up, performance has both the strong utility functions associated with creating enhanced emotional acuity and social transformation, and the ideal mechanisms to accomplish these functions through symbolic elements conveyed through visual and auditory channels. I hypothesize that individuals with the capacity to engage in this kind of activity have many advantages in life over those that do not. They succeed in terms of enhanced decision making, better chances in establishing a functionally useful position in social hierarchies, and attracting allies and potential mates.

Performance is Inherently Enjoyable for Both Performer and Audience

Just as so many other functionally useful things in human life are reinforced by pleasurable feelings, performance generally 'feels good' for everyone involved. Humans genuinely enjoy performance both as performers and as audience, and this reduces inhibitions about participating in performance. I may be understating the case. Audience members go back repeatedly to experience it, as I mentioned at the beginning of this essay.

The 'flow' sensation arising from total engagement in performance is one of the reinforcing sensations, but not the only one. I have already invoked the fact that the cognitive frame is one of the most basic aspects of human behaviour. One of the most common forms of framed behaviour is 'play'. Performance shares so many features with play behaviour that it can be thought of in the same light.[23] The enjoyment humans derive from play has been extensively commented upon.

One source of pleasure in play and performance may be the ability of these routines to tap into some of the most basic human emotions. A number of researchers have posited a list of basic, innate emotions, among them McDougall (1908/1923), Tomkins (1962) Izard (1971), Plutchik (1994), Frijda (1986, 1994) and Ekman

(1992). All of these researchers vary both in the list of specific innate emotions they posit, and the ways that emotions that are more complex are derived. Tomkins's early list: surprise, interest, joy, rage, fear, disgust, shame and anguish, is typical. Such formulations are hardly new. The *Natyasastra,* an Indian treatise on dramatic arts complied between the second century BCE and the second century CE lists nine basic emotional states or *rasas:* love, mirth, sadness, anger, heroism, fear, disgust, surprise and peace.[24]

The intriguing possibility we find in performance is that emotions may be involved twice. First basic emotions such as interest, joy and surprise may be involved to encourage engagement in performance. Second, emotions are aroused during the course of performance. This *double emotional involvement* may be one of the strongest motivating factors for humans to seek out and repeat performance behaviour.

John Emigh suggests an additional source of enjoyment for performance: it allows humans to use all of their faculties in the exercise of exuberant play.

> The 'framing' of performance ... is both protective and liberating: Why the complex reworking of emotional states, the endless variations on and subversions of the 'who–done–it'? Why the manic persona shifting of a Robin Williams or the radical attack on social constructs of race and gender of an Anna Deavere Smith or a Kate Bornstein? To make the stone stony, as Shklovsky (*sic*). He needs to be introduced to reinvest the world with wonder, to move men and women to action, as Brecht hoped. No doubt. But most of all, I suspect, and as a prelude to all of these worthy aims, to exercise our sensory and cognitive faculties in a situation where we are freed from decisions that may affect lives and livelihoods, where nothing seems to be at stake, and, in that purchased or stolen time between times, to question our categorical precepts, and to keep our responses alert and working. To use all our mental capacities while monitoring the bodies of others in action. To do this for enjoyment, because, owing to sensory and cognitive systems that have evolved, no doubt, for very different purposes, this activity makes wonderful use of everything that the body-minded brain does best. (Emigh 2002: 262–3)

Finally, humans, like other primates, are fascinated by themselves. Many researchers have noted that performance holds up a 'mirror' to spectators.[25] Turner's epigram at the beginning of this chapter—'in performing [man] reveals himself to himself' (Turner 1987: 81)—reflects this truth. Schechner (1990: 43) has noted that performance is 'twice behaved behavior', since it derives from natural behavior, but is rehearsed and repeated for an audience. The human capacity to exhibit Theory of Mind as discussed above is a clear prerequisite for both performer and audience (Emigh 2002: 262–3).

It is noteworthy that humans especially enjoy seeing performance that emphasizes and underscores the limits of human behaviour. Exemplary goodness, badness, and extremes of physical skill are among the most popular themes of performance.[26] It also shows reversal and transformation. In this regard, the mirror of performance is a fun-house mirror. It exaggerates, simplifies, and distorts in the subjunctive mode

examined by Turner as cited above. It holds the promise and wonder of witnessing things as they might be without the danger of the actual disruption that true change might bring.

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Notes

1. I hope readers will forgive me citing this anecdote, which I have used in a previous publication on singing and emotion (Beeman 2005). The anecdote serves the purposes of both topics admirably.
2. I take the position that emotional states are cognitive states, as will be seen below, but include them both here given the commonly held view that they are distinct.
3. As will be seen below, I include under performance not just events that occur in formal performance settings, but also many of the routines of everyday life, and face-to-face behavior. This tradition dates back to Goffman (1959, 1967, 1971, 1974), Garfinkel (1967) and a long pedigree of ethnomethodologists and symbolic interactionists. (See Singer 1972 for an early application to Indian society.)
4. Much of this will be familiar ground for those with knowledge of the work of Turner, Schechner, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, Myerhoff, Zarilli and other luminaries in the field of performance studies. I do not intend to take personal credit for these ideas, but rather to lay them out here as a foundation for subsequent discussion.
5. As will be seen below, the role of audience or performer is the result of an interactional dynamic relationship. Throughout a performance the roles may be fixed, as is usual in theatrical events, or as in the case of conversational interaction, may alternate or exist simultaneously with each other. They are, however, symbiotic. One role cannot exist without the other; they define each other.
6. Naturally, emotional reactions occur in all sorts of human situations, most of them outside of performance events. As I will argue, performance may have

adaptive value precisely because it allows the experience of emotions one may not encounter in everyday life.

7. See also Goodwin (1986) for additional perspectives on the direction of attention in conversational performance.
8. See Duranti (1986) and Bennet (1990) for more perspectives on the audience as collaborator.
9. Again, I remind readers that cognitive state as I use the term in this discussion includes emotions and dispositions to action, or embodiment.
10. Literally 'almond' because of its shape.
11. C. Wright Mills points out that the initial formulation of the pragmatic position took place some years before in a paper Peirce wrote for a group of friends which included William James, whose position on this matter I have already alluded to (Mills: 1964: 86).
12. Cf. Ekman 1992, and Ekman, Levenson, and Friesen 1983.
13. Emotional contagion is the latest manifestation of an old concept in psychology, *Einfühlung* (Lipps 1903) whereby an individual is thought to project feelings onto an object of observation. McDougall describes emotional contagion as 'the primitive, passive sympathy', a nonspecific tendency for like emotions to be evoked in observers of emotional displays (1996: 78–82). He cites examples of children who smile in response to a smile from their mother, people who feel tenderness watching a mother-infant interaction, and chimpanzees that are aroused by the distress of a conspecific. Bråten (1998) posits an interesting concept, which he terms 'e-motion' noting that infants learn to develop an accord with adults by matching their bodily movements. He thus hypothesizes that infants exhibit an 'inherent self-other connectivity that enables infants unwittingly to feel a virtual moving with the movements of others' (1998: 105). If Bråten is correct, this 'e-motion' disposition would be the basis for the development of the intersubjectivity necessary for the development of Theory of Mind as described below. His theory gains plausibility when it is understood that autistic children also exhibit 'imitation errors' in early development to a greater degree than nonautistic children.
14. This echoes the developmental theory of Bråten cited in note 13. We might expect Mead's generalized other to have originally arisen from the infants' predisposition to physical imitation of other individuals in their social universe (Bråten 1998).
15. It is notable that a recent, celebrated volume on Theory of Mind (Carruthers and Smith 1996) does not reference Mead even once.
16. This is an almost perfect paraphrase of Mead's formulation.
17. The term folk-psychology is used in the sense of lay accounting procedures that people (nonscientists and nonphilosophers, one presumes) use to account for the mental states of others.
18. The question of Theory of Mind is closely allied to a long-standing philosophical question—that of *intentionality.* In recent years this problem has been approached

by a number of philosophers, most notably Dan Dennett (1969, 1987, 1988), John Searle (1979, 1982, 1983) and Stephen Stich (1981, 1983). The problem derives ultimately from the nineteenth-century philosopher Franz Brentano, who claimed to have made a clear distinction between mental phenomena and physical phenomena. Mental phenomena exhibit intentionality:

> Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the scholastics of the Middle Ages called the Intentional (and also mental) inexistence (Inexistenz) of an object (Gegenstand) and what we would call, although in not entirely unambiguous terms, the reference to a content, a direction upon an object. (quoted in Dennett 1969:20)

Dennett and others have taken this as a 'disposition toward an object'. Searle claims that "Intentional states represent objects and states of affairs in exactly the same sense that speech acts represent objects and states of affairs (Searle 1982: 260). While many philosophical questions about the nature of intentionality remain live, the aspects that concern performance for the purposes of this discussion have been subsumed under the discussion of emotion and Theory of Mind above. I have never seen George Herbert Mead discussed in conjunction with questions of intentionality, but his theory of action, discussed above, is clearly pertinent.

19. Of course, chimpanzees and other great apes do possess amygdalar structures. They also exhibit behavior that has been identified in humans as involving the amygdala in a central way, such as facial recognition (cf. Goodall, 1986; Povinelli, Nelson, K. E., Nelson, B., and Nelson, S. T. 1992).
20. It is possible for an audience to unwittingly be entrapped in a performance frame. This entrapment is a 'con', whether perpetrated by an individual or a group. Erving Goffman has written extensively about this kind of performance. Even when one becomes entrapped, at some point the performance frame is revealed, and at that juncture the audience chooses to continue to participate or to exit. Some audiences may continue to 'play along' even when the performance is revealed for a variety of reasons: politeness, curiosity, desire for revenge, embarrassment at having been entrapped or ineptitude at making an escape. Salesmen, seducers and thieves hope to entrap people so thoroughly that they are unable to leave the frame without carrying out some action desired by the performer. See Beeman (1982) for examples of how these dynamics play out in the cultural framework of Iranian society, and Helfgot and Beeman (1993) for their application in musical performance.
21. Schechner (1993: 27) referred to this as a 'safety net, or a chance to call time-out'. See also Schechner 1988.
22. Schechner (1993: 228–30) argues for subsuming performance under the rubric of ritual. I would subsume ritual under the rubric of performance. We have little

argument here. Schechner unites performance and ritual in his way by focusing on acts and institutions (but his ground has shifted too; see Schechner 1990). I unite the two in my way by focusing on behavioral capacities and functions. There is no doubt in either of our formulations about the essential unity of these human phenomena or their functions in human life. See Beeman (1982) for examples of how these dynamics play out in the cultural framework of Iranian society, and Helfgot (1993) for their application in musical performance.

23. I have here to resist following this discussion of play further for fear of losing the main thread of my argument. Others have trod this ground extensively, and I refer readers to the numerous works written on the fascinating topic of human play, including some already mentioned: Bateson (1955), Turner (1974, 1982), Schechner (1988, 1993) and the classic work by Huizinga (1955). I am content here with the point that both play and performance are entered into willingly in part because they are so vastly enjoyed. See Goffman's essay on "Fun in Games" (1967) for one of the best discussions on this point. This is also extended in Goffman (1971).
24. The final *rasa,* peace, was added at a later date (cf. Schechner 1990: 32–6)
25. It noteworthy that the ability of a child (or a nonhuman primate) to recognize themselves in an *actual* mirror is used by child psychologists as a test of normal intellectual and emotional development.
26. Wise theatrical producers who want to attract the attention of young people put children in their productions. If they are used well, the children virtually guarantee the rapt attention of other children in their audience.