

## Steps Toward a Performative Social Science

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For the past thirty years I have been involved in the creation of a new area of qualitative study called performative social science. My task in this chapter is to introduce this field by sketching its contours and development. Since the 1980's, I have engaged in creating this exciting, but controversial approach, and I have witnessed much of the work of others. I hope to give credit to those who have set the process of performative social science in motion, to those who have brought this approach to their own fields of inquiry and to share some of my own work.

As a form of qualitative inquiry, performative activities involve the prominent use of various aesthetic expressions in the execution of research. Performative activities may include various forms of art, drama, poetry, music, dance, multi-media creations, and the like (Gergen & Gergen, 1996, 2010, 2012; Madison & Hamera, 2006). Performance-enhanced social science projects may be textual, technologically mediated, or "live," with audience involvement. The use of performance methods within the research domain is in its nascent stage; the earliest works have taken place only within the last three decades; critical questions abound regarding the scientific adequacy of such work. However, interest in performativity has been rapidly increasing across the social sciences, and as a result the creation of new academic forums, especially journals that are receptive to performative work, have been developed. (See, for example, *Qualitative Inquiry*, *International Review of Qualitative Inquiry*, *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, and the two on-line journals, *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (In German, *Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung*) and *Qualitative Research*, all of which might feature poetry, visual images, scripts, and other forms of performative techniques.

On-line venues have been particularly receptive to performance work, in part, because they offer resources for presentations that more conventional paper journals cannot. See, for example, a special issue of the *Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung* that featured 42 examples of performative inquiry ([www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/issue/view/10](http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/issue/view/10)) with a diversity of visual forms incorporated

into it. The annual meeting of the International Conference on Qualitative Inquiry, organized by Norman Denzin at the University of Illinois, provides an inviting platform for performative work. The gathering attracts over a thousand international scholars in the qualitative field and highlights work of such well-known social science performance artists as Tami Spry (2001), Laurel Richardson (1997), Ron Pelias (1999) and Johnny Saldaña (2011).

A performative orientation also calls attention to the various ways in which all methods of inquiry are performances of a kind, fashioned within a preferred tradition of representation. Experiments are highly performative in that scenes are set, actors are trained, events are manipulated, and outcomes are related to the performances that have occurred. Interviews and focus groups, surveys and observations all require a certain level of performance for them to be carried out properly. That said, the performative social scientist acknowledges the performance qualities of the inquiry, but extends the aesthetic emphasis. In placing the focus on the performative dimension, researchers hope to open new paths and potentials for discovery, expression, and communication.

On the theoretical side, a performative orientation to research often draws from dramaturgical theory in its approach to human action (Goffman, 1959; Newman & Holzman, 1996; Sarbin, 1986), or in Shakespeare's words, "all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players." From this perspective, the performative nature of human relationships is implicated in their doing, and thus, a performative analysis is coherent with the drama of everyday life.

In terms of philosophy, the term "performative" is drawn from J.L. Austin's work, *How to do things with words* (1962), in which he refers to the way in which utterances perform various social functions over and above conveying content. Words are social actions in themselves. For example, in a marriage ceremony, the minister's words, "Now I pronounce you husband and wife," changes the nature of the couple's social status, both privately and in terms of public record. To apply this theoretical notion to performative social science, the ways in which we express the content of our inquiry are actions in relationships. Thus, we may ask, what kinds of relationships do we encourage or discourage in our current practices of academic writing? Many would argue that such

practices lend themselves to hierarchies, alienation, and competition, and prevent access from outside the academic world. From a performative standpoint, we begin to ask about alternatives. How else could we express ourselves? Let us employ every aesthetic means at our disposal.

Performative inquiry also expands the sensitivities of social scientists to the subject of their research. When we frame a research project, for example, we typically consider the endpoint in terms of how it will be communicated. If we must have statistics to publish our work, for example, we will approach our research subjects in terms of how we can extract numerical measurements from their behavior. However, if we approach their actions as forms of theater performance, we begin to view their behavior in a different way. Or, if we wish to express our insights in poetry, dance, or visual art, still different orientations to the subjects of our research are invited. As we take on various modes of performance, we come to experience the potentials for inquiry and analysis in new ways. This is also to say that performative social scientists enter into the research process with more of their senses and passions available. Of signal importance is the power of the performance piece to evoke emotional responses in the audience or readers. The formulation of the performance piece is boundless in terms of the affect that may be involved, from laughter to tears. For this reason, they are much more powerful, in terms of interest value, action-potentials and persuasion than non-performative pieces, no matter how statistically sound or intellectually profound they might be. Performative scientists recognize their contributions to the research process as living, sensual, involved beings, with all the consequences this recognition entails.

### History and Disciplinary Dispersion

The performative orientation to social research has many and varied roots, within the social sciences and without. In philosophy the distinction between science and art has long been questioned, with scholars pointing to the various ways in which scientific theory and descriptions are suffused with literary forms, such as metaphors and narratives, and guided by visual imagery (e.g. waves, matrices). In this vein, science is not defined by virtue of its contrast with performance; it is itself a form of performance (see, for example, Arnheim, 1989, and McCloskey, 1985). This blurring of the

boundaries between science and art blunts the criticism that if one is doing performative work, it is art and not science. Rather it is possible to be doing both at the same time.

The late 20<sup>th</sup> century emergence of performance art has brought attention to the potentials of uniting art and social commentary for stimulating social change (Scheckner, 2002). This combination has served as inspiration for social scientists who share similar social justice concerns. Strikingly diverse performances have been created, often with the capacity to shock and stir audiences into questioning their basic assumptions about art and their own social environments (Goldberg, 1979, 2007). Artists such as Andy Warhol's Velvet Underground troop, Phillip Glass, Laurie Anderson, Maria Abramovich, and Gilbert & George - among an international cast of characters - have gained attention through their revealing and provocative performances. Their performances have found great resonance with performatively oriented social scientists.

Sociologists have also had a longstanding interest in performance-oriented research. The field of visual sociology, emphasizing photography as a major means of illuminating the social world is but one realization (see, the International Visual Sociology Association and Pink, 2006, 2009). Further, sociologists invested in liberation politics, have found dramatic performance a major means of engaging people in social change movements. The work of Augusto Boal (1995) is seminal in this respect. Working with oppressed people, primarily in Brazil, he engaged audiences in theatrically rich encounters within what he called the Theater of the Oppressed. Boal's work encouraged actors to identify their grievances and experience the solidarity that would serve them in resisting powerful oppositional forces. Jonathan Shailor (2010) is among the more recent disciples of Boal, working in a theater form with prison populations to effect personal and social change.

Researchers who identify their methodology as Participatory Action Research (PAR) are often involved with performance techniques in doing their research. This research is characterized by researchers who do not stand apart from their subject matter, but become deeply involved in relationships with their participants. For example, living in a village in Central America with the local people, M. Brinton Lykes encouraged her Guatemalan women participants to learn to take pictures with a simple camera, as a step

toward enhancing their sense of entitlement in difficult conditions following civil warfare (Lykes, 1989; Lykes & Moane, 2009). Anthropologists have also contributed significantly to a performance orientation. Of particular significance is the work of Victor Turner (1968, 1982, 1986), who created the notion of social drama to describe his findings related to conflict and its resolution among a Zambian tribe, as well as contributed many other ideas to anthropology's performance repository. The quintessential postmodern performance anthropologist remains Steven Tyler, (), whose highly poetic, if hieroglyphic, writings have brought various critical attention to his vision of the field (Gergen, 2001).

In Women's Studies, developments in both the sciences and the arts, have stimulated considerations about the nature of gender itself. For many, theorizing gender as a cultural performance - as opposed to a biological given - has been a powerful catalyst (see especially Butler, 1990; 1993). On this account, when we engage in typical sex role behaviors, we are enacting the roles as we have been taught to play them. Feminists have explored sexuality, embodiment, and power through performative means (Gotfrit, 1991; Lockford, 2004; Ronai, 1992). Issues of health and medical treatment for women with breast cancer became the focus of a Canadian theater production, with patients playing roles related to their own disease (Gray & Sinding, 2002).

Performative explorations have also appealed to scholars in Gay and Lesbian studies. For example, Glenda Russell (Russell & Bohan, 1999), a psychologist, transformed survey research findings into "Fire," an oratorio, which has been performed several times. A recent contribution to performance inquiry has been a full length movie, *Rufus Stone*, created from research by Kip Jones on the lives of older gay men living in rural England. The movie, developed first in the academic world, crossed over into the public world, and was shown at the Toronto Film Festival in 2012. Here is a good indicator of how performative work has potentials to reach a much larger audience than the traditional research project.

In Communication Studies, especially important developments surround the emergence of ethnographic methods (Brady, 2005; Conquergood, 1982, 1989, 1992; Denzin, 1997; McCall, 2000). Rather than expressing the complexity of their

ethnographic experiences in traditional academic writing, performance-oriented scholars found a variety of aesthetic means to bring their topics to life. Out of the ethnographic movement, a specific form of autoethnography, which became highly performative, was developed. Autoethnographers used their own experience and reflections (as opposed to reporting on others) as a means of giving insight into particular conditions. This work has frequently expanded the range of expression in the performative direction, including novels and theatrical scripts (Ellis, 2004; Richardson, 1997; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Carolyn Ellis (1995, 2004) has been a leader in the development of autoethnography, as well as an active advocate of performance work among scholars, including Lisa Tillman-Healy (1996), Karen Fox (1996) and Carol Ronai, (1992). Excellent compendiums of this work are found in edited volumes by Caroline Ellis and Art Bochner, *Composing Ethnography* (1996) and Bochner & Ellis, *Ethnographically Speaking* (2007). However, there is also increasing movement toward full-blow performance. For example, Johnny Saldaña, an educator and musician, has transformed an aspect of his life story into an hour long theatrical piece, “Second Chair” during which he plays music as well as speaks lines (Saldaña, 2011).

In psychology, the earliest users of performance were largely therapists. Jacob Moreno (1947) who created the psychodrama format, Eric Berne (1954), who popularized the phrase “Games People Play,” and George Kelly (1955), who emphasized role playing in therapy, were all important in demonstrating the ways in which performance may be used for exploration, both of one’s past life and of potentials for future action. More recently, performance studies were highlighted at symposia which Ken Gergen and I organized over a five year period, from 1995-1999, at the American Psychological Association national meetings. Sessions were composed of dramatic monologues, dance, multi-media presentations, plays, and poems. Kareen Mor Malone was likely the first to offer a multimedia display in psychology with her 1995 performance of Lacanian theory using video, power point visuals, aural recordings, and her own “live” voice. Another major innovator in performance studies is the East Side Institute, where dramatic productions are integral to educational, therapeutic and community building functions (Newman, 1996; Newman & Holzman, 1996). Marcelo Diversi, (1998) studying the street children of Rio de Janeiro, converted his experiences

into short stories that featured the lives of these children; without claiming to be reporting straightforward observations, Diversi found that writing short stories allowed him the freedom to express his understanding in a compelling, yet efficient, fashion.

Ken Gergen has been a close companion to my performative efforts. Not only has he been a supporter, sounding-board and co-creator, but he has created a number of performative offerings on his own and in collaboration with others. Among his early works were poetic renderings of his theoretical work, conjoined with the drawings of Zurich artist, Regine Walter (Gergen and Walter, 1998). He has also teamed up with photographer Anne Marie Rijsman to create a variety of fascinating visual images, which often have a satirical bite (See, for example, K. Gergen, 2009). One striking example has been the use of photographic artistry to bring his theoretical work to life. With the help of Anne Marie Rijsman, he developed the following “wing” metaphor to illustrate his concept of multi-being, or the way in which we are constituted within multiple



relationships.

Then, in his proposal that the multi-being is essentially brought into meaningful life in encountering other beings, a second wing was added. This interaction is illustrated with the icon of the full “butterfly” (Gergen & Gergen, 2012).



### Moments from My Performative Life

My own explorations in performative work began over 30 years ago. From my engagement in social constructionist theory, I realized that there were no ultimately privileged forms of description and explanation. And from my engagement in feminist issues, it was clear to me that there was a place for political passion in social science. These interests were conjoined in my 2001 book, *Feminist Reconstructions in Psychology: Narrative, Gender and Performance*. Among my works over time were theater pieces, monologues, poems, cartoons, mime, music, and various literary pieces

that diverted from traditional academic writings. Some were designed for live performances and others were written as texts. Many of my performance pieces appear in my book with Kenneth J. Gergen, *Playing with Purpose: Performative Social Science* (Gergen & Gergen, 2012). The photo on the book's cover conveys its intent: traditions



of fact and fiction join hands.

In what follows, I share some moments from my performance history. I have chosen pieces that range over a variety of topics and styles of performing, and I also suggest some of the rationale that guided me in my choices.

### Challenging Stereotypes: Woman as Spectacle

In a number of diverse venues, I performed a monologue called “PostMod Mama”, or “Woman as Spectacle.” The work was created to counteract the powerful social stereotype that older women “don’t count,” or are not worth listening to, in social

life. In some sense, it is appropriate that they should disappear. Often I perform the monologue as a woman who resembles the famous Hollywood and Vaudeville actress, Mae West, wearing a big blond wig, a sexy red dress, a fuchsia feather boa, copious jewelry, and a gold lame bag and heels. The theatrical function of the costume is to violate conventions of respectability, which is an expectation of how older women should behave.



Although the piece begins with some bravado about not being ignored or disappearing, the following is a lament as to what is feared, as a woman growing old.

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The spectacle under construction needs more introduction. Over there [POMO

points to another part of the stage] are people who would want to strip me of my style. At my age, (chronological that is) I am meant to disappear. I should have been gone long ago. In the dance of the life cycle, I am being propelled against the wall. [moving backwards as though being pushed from the front, arms extended, curled in the middle] Centrifugal forces spin me to the chairs, from which I rose so long ago...arms that circled me, and kept me on the floor. Oh, how I could dance. [Pomo does a bit of a cha cha cha].

[Takes up a sheer purple scarf that is tucked into the purse]. Now they've let me go. My dance card is empty. [Pomo places the large scarf over her head, covering her face]. Now, I'm melding with the walls. pressing into paper...melting with the glue...Stuck, not pinned and wriggling like Eliot's Prufrock, but misting into mottled lavender, without a muscle's twitch. [Standing with arms out, covered by the veil of purple.] This is the fate woman of a mature age. [Removes scarf, keeps it in hand.] She is somewhere over 40, and, according to some, about as useful as a fruitfly (at least they have the courtesy to die swiftly when their breeding days are done.) If she cannot procreate she is lifeless you see, but not dead. She never should attract attention. She learns to be the anti-spectacle. Yet she is the object of our gaze.

Such hatred we sometimes feel for her [wringing scarf like a neck]. That shameful blot on the image of our youth. Couldn't we just wring her neck? Be done with her. No one needs her. ..hoarder of Medicare ... Social Security sadsack...our tax dollars feeding a body no one wants to see.

But lest we discard her so quickly she is also me, and perhaps you. She is our destiny, those of the female persuasion. Ugghhh, should we call for our pills, ply ourselves with hormones? Slather on our creams? Invite the knife to cut into our own throats, and pay for that pleasure? [Making slitting gestures.]

Or shall we tipple into our drugs of sweet forgetting? [Takes another brandy sip.]

Is there anyone to call? Is there anyone at all?

Today she is the creature under construction. And I, in my spectacular role, a Postmodern Mama, with nothing to lose but my invisibility. I challenge those who would

erase these fine lines. [motions over body].

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### Beyond Isolated Selves: What's Wrong With My "I"?

In another live performance, my attentions turned to our relationship with the physical world. I was playing with the idea that as a culture our senses were becoming increasingly separated from nature, as if there were a thin film or glaze that insulates our bodies from intense and immediate contact with nature, with the earth. To perform this monologue, I costumed myself in a long grey coat with a hood, thus covering my body and head. On my hands I wore heavy oven mitts, which insulated me from any environmental sensation.



An excerpt from the performance text follows.

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I feel sometimes that I am shrink wrapped.. closed off from the earth... I remember that feeling in the mountains where I was walking one summer in a field of wildflowers, somewhere out West. I was aware of the wavy grass, the multicolored flowers of pink, blue, purple, golden, and white, the big blue sky with fluffy clouds, the lush evergreen trees on the mountainside, the warm and gentle sun, and the sounds of the natural world surrounding me. Beyond the package of me, there was the unfulfilled promise of the possibility of an experience of beauty, of rapture, of spiritual fulfillment, powerful and magnificent.. it was like an inkling of an untold secret, but one that would not be revealed to me. Somehow I didn't know how to slice open the package I was in, the separating spheres of me, even as I lay down in the field to feel it with my body, not just with my eyes. Two possibilities occur to me. Out of my literary tradition, I am seeking the instantiation of Thoreau and Emerson's transcendental aura, which only exists on the page, and never in the flesh. My shrink wrapped self is my destiny. Or, there may be a way to slip this shell and join in some other way of being in the world.

I think of how we socialize our babies into the world.. tenderly wrapping them in our saran-ated way. We learn and teach that who we are is within us, in our private sphere unreachable deep within our skulls. Our action center, our sensory center, our self is so impenetrable that we cannot access it, only in our dreams. We learn that a war goes on within, between our feelings and our thoughts, our desires and our principles, and we learn to control the warring factions as best we can. We learn our specialness, our uniqueness, our separateness from all other creatures and things. We take pride in being true to ourselves, independent, free, and self-contained.

This separation shrink wraps us in our places. But often there is a yearning to break through our isolation, to connect again, as we suspect we once could do.

How is it possible to break through our individual loneliness?.. that is what we wonder.

There seem to be ways: Let me mention a few

We meditate, practice Yoga, and sit alone on mats, dreaming with an empty mind, if possible, hoping to escape our separate existences and experience nirvana.

Some choose the route through drugs and alcohol; the sweet elixirs of forgetfulness; others find glimpses of release in sexual encounters, and the ecstasy of love and the grief of death -- tragedy and loss.. For some, only the extremes – jumping out of airplanes, driving racecars, shooting guns, cutting our own flesh –

becoming Mentally Ill

frees us, from time to time.

The childlike impulse to play and laugh, ... rolling down the hill.. digging in the sand, splashing in the mud puddle, licking snowflakes with our tongues, these create momentary ways to lose ourselves in the flow

Art works: painting, singing, dancing, poetry, drama..

All are about losing our specialness.. our singularity, our egocentrism..

Breaking through...

What holds us back.. ?? Psychology didn't help us.. Our lessons in individualism.. our private space.. our brain-ness... our me-ness.

Letting go of my I... remaining in connectedness... being at one in our relations..... with nature, animals... children, other people.. notice our skin on the air, in the air, with the air. Our bodies warming the air, the air cooling our bodies.....

Its time to rethink our positions in space and time. We need a new metaphor..a new psychology. What if We are not one, but a wheel of many. We are made from our relationships, past and future, and inbetween. If we think of ourselves as socially conceived, as a part of all we touch, as created and co-creating in the moment as we live. If we give up our individuality, and cherish our connections. If we take our relational processes as creating our selves.. then what?

Moments and memories of connection.. all into the oneness of the universe... a thrilling encounter.. endlessly revolving.. endlessly creating... endlessly ending ... ephemeral...

untrustworthy... momentary.. resilient... careless... carefree... coming into being  
through our we-ness.

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### Autoethnography as Poetry: Glimpses of Reunion

Recently I attended a 50 year high school class reunion. The entire experience was ethnographically rich, as relationship dynamics were variously re-created. But rather than writing about the experience in a coherent narrative, I decided to encapsulate it in a form of Haiku poetry. The use of 17 syllables invited me to focus on concise emotionally laden nuggets of meaning, abstracted from commonplace events.

Joy to reunite!  
Perhaps if we are lucky  
We find a lost self.

Years collapse into a pile  
Making a confusing, rubbled  
Treasure trove.

Neural pathways slashed open  
As memories return.  
I cannot sleep.

Hard to believe, but here  
I make a new friend  
From an old acquaintance.

Lined faces and old eyes  
Glide into youth  
As dusk darkens into night.

Looking into eyes  
across the years  
We find our young togetherness.

Grey coals of passion, long asleep,  
Spark in the breath  
Of a gentle fanning.

We cry as we embrace.  
Do our hearts know it may be  
For the last time?

For tonight the clock plays the fool.  
Is Death no wiser for the disguise?

These are but a few of my own adventures in performative work. In other work I have enjoyed, I used a lot of discourse analysis in writing about menopausal research with a focus group, but I used the voice of a Steppenwolf character, whose job it was to question and criticize me, the author of the text (Gergen, 2001). This invention allowed the reader to recognize that the smoothness of the text, which attempts to “glamour into being” its conclusions, had crevices and cracks in its connective tissue. By suggesting that the interpretation made by the author might be otherwise, the character warns the reader of the dangers of being persuaded by any text.

In another manuscript I tried to emphasize the diversity of perspectives that can be taken on a particular event through the use of performative writing; in the end, one is left puzzling over the clash of values involved. To signal the complexity I began the text with 7 titles, each of which suggested a different interpretation of events. The actual case that inspired this paper occurred at my university: A woman professor removed from her classroom a reproduction of the famed Spanish painting, *The Naked Maja*, by Goya, which hung on the wall behind her desk. She removed it because several of the male students had made lewd comments about it during class. Word of its removal became a

matter of public discussion, with art critics and university officials getting involved. In various news stories, Penn State University was accused of being without cultural sophistication and the teacher was described as narrow minded and silly. In my text I compared this incident at Penn State to one regarding the production and ownership of this painting in 1850's Spain. The Penn State triangle involved the Woman Professor, the Male Administrators and Critics, and the Boys in the classroom. The Spanish triangle involved Goya, the Duchess of Alba (the presumed model), and the patron and owner of the painting, the Prime Minister of Spain. With photographs and drawings, I compared the two triangles in terms of the nature of dominant males as the seers and females as the seen. Using the historical materials as background, the parallels of masculine power over women were explored. Yet, where was the place of art in this power struggle? The inventive use of this comparison seemed to provide a variety of perspectives on these timeless issues.

#### Future Potentials of Performative Science

Both the enthusiasm for performative work and its contribution to social science deliberations are substantial. There is also ample reason for optimism in terms of the future of such efforts. This is not only the case in terms of the burgeoning of qualitative research across the social sciences, but as well in terms of the opportunity that such research represents for the fledgling scholar. Performative inquiry, as we have seen, invites the scholar to engage with issues that have significant personal value. Thus, rather than being forced by the profession to join topical areas that are already fixed, the performative domain invites the scholar into inventive and personally meaningful intellectual encounters. Further, the domain invites scholars to use communicative skills (e.g. in music, art, theater, dance) that have otherwise been excluded from their professional life. For some it is an opportunity to learn new skills and experiment with novel intersections of various forms of presentation.

This is not to say that the future of such work is unproblematic. Of all the developments in qualitative inquiry, performative practices are the most radical. This is so because, unlike most qualitative practices, they challenge the identity of the discipline and the disciples. By blurring the boundary between science and art, fact and fiction,

seriousness and play, they challenge “normal science” activities and standards. And, within the domain of the performative there remain important questions. Two of these are prominent. First, how is it possible to judge the quality or merit of performance work? Traditional standards for evaluating research (e.g. validity and reliability, statistical sophistication) are scarcely applicable; this loss makes it difficult for editorial gatekeepers to make judgments about merit. One editor of a prestigious journal in psychology returned a submitted performatively-oriented article with the hostile comment, “I didn’t even send it out for review. The sample size was 6 participants!” What new criteria should be considered? Standards, such as cultural significance, communicative power, and aesthetic value, for example, are all possible contenders for judging the competence and quality of a performance piece. Yet, even these invite debate. To illustrate this challenge, I was asked to evaluate a recent PhD “dissertation” from the University of Bournemouth (Zoë Fitzgerald Poole, 2008). It arrived in a wooden box, inscribed with a brass nameplate, inside of which were placed two books, each page illustrated in colorful graphics, denoting the outcomes of interviews, synthesized by the author. Also included were DVDs with visual and auditory expositions of this material. As appreciative gifts to the readers, there was also music, a mermaid doll, a large doll representing a stuffy old-fashioned professor, chocolates, and hundreds of tiny wrapped up scrolls each with a quotation taken from interviews written in elegant calligraphy. There was a map to describe how to explore this ménage, which had all been organized into small wooden sections of the box. I was delighted, excited, and inspired by the collection, and I learned. But could I support my positive evaluation? The dissertation oral exam also proved to be controversial as questions arose about the scientific merits of the research process and the representations of the results. Yet, I am pleased to say, the dissertation did succeed in meriting a Ph.D. degree.

The second problematic issue is that of the accumulation of knowledge and the progress of the discipline. Traditional social science prized itself on these capacities. In the case of performative inquiry, there may be progress in terms of communicative efficacy, but an investment in increments in knowledge is typically replaced by a concern with making an immediate impact of cultural significance. Performance-oriented scholars note that because patterns of social life are continuously transforming, the emphasis on

accumulation is misleading. The social sciences acquire their significance less from attempting to clarify the nature of social life, create lawful propositions, verify hypotheses or predict the future from observations of the past than from offering new perspectives on the nature of social life, contributing to dialogues about important issues facing the society, and entering into these deliberations in order to affect the future. The challenge is not to mirror the status quo, but to change it. In this way the social sciences become more significant in the shaping of communal futures.

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