Performance and problematization in rhetorical culture: the example of Laurie Anderson

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Performance and problematization in rhetorical culture:
the example of Laurie Anderson

by

Kirstin Jean Cronn-Mills

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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1997
This is to certify that the Doctoral dissertation of
Kirstin Jean Cronn-Mills
has met the dissertation requirements of Iowa State University.

Co-Major Professor

Co-Major Professor

For the Major Program

For the Graduate College
For Dan and Karna, for sharing their considerable strengths.
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Still, as a storyteller, I am struck by how a person’s sense of consciousness can be transformed by nothing more magical than listening to words ... mere words.

Charles Nelson Reilly, “José Chung’s ‘From Outer Space’
The X Files

These either/or ways of seeing exclude life and real revision by pushing us to safe positions, to what is known. The are safe positions that exclude each other and don’t allow for any ambiguity, uncertainty. Only when I suspend myself between either and or can I move away from conventional boundaries and begin to see shapes and shadows and contours—ambiguity, uncertainty, and discontinuity, moments when the seams of life just don’t want to hold; days when I wake up to find, once again, that I don’t have enough bread for the children’s sandwiches or that there are no shoelaces for their gym shoes. My life is full of uncertainty; negotiating that uncertainty day to day gives me authority.

Nancy Sommers, “Between the Drafts

... madness fascinates because it is knowledge. It is knowledge, first, because all these absurd figures are in reality elements of a difficult, hermetic, esoteric learning.... While the man of reason and wisdom perceives only fragmentary and all the more unnerving images of it, the Fool bears it intact as an unbroken sphere, that crystal ball which for all others is empty is in his eyes filled with the density of an invisible knowledge.

Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization
CHAPTER ONE:
PERFORMANCE COMPLEXITY AND CULTURAL INQUIRY

A performance completes, or thoroughly carries out, social processes. (Stem and Henderson 9)

If Stern and Henderson are correct, then performance is integral to every social act we complete. Performance happens in the classroom and on the stage. Performance takes place in the way we conduct business and live with family members. Performance is everywhere. According to Brooks McNamara and Richard Schechner, performance is “ethnic and intercultural, historical and ahistorical, aesthetic and ritual, sociological and political,” and represents “a mode of behavior, an approach to experience” (5). Performance involves the sweep of human behavior.

Embedded within these performances are cultural structures and beliefs. These cultural entities in performance make their presence know by creating roles for us to enact. These cultural patterns and roles can be labeled codes. We understand, respect, and respond to coded behaviors because these behaviors are familiar to us; the codes are written in the rules of society. A teacher is regulated by the cultural codes related to the idea of “teacher,” and students are regulated by the codes that apply to “students”. In this dissertation I consider how to study the idea of cultural codes and their effects on our lives.
Specifically, I explore how studying cultural performances allows us to identify and challenge cultural structures at work within the performance. Disassembling performances will provide us with a way to examine these cultural structures. Performance scholars Carole Simpson Stern and Bruce Henderson expand further on their definition of performance, claiming performance as "an enactment of self and society, providing a mirror for culture and presenting collective knowledge" (107). These performances can be as intricate as a stage play or as casual as an office conversation. Thinking of performance as everyday events allows us to take Stern and Henderson's "enactment of self and society" very literally. I argue throughout this dissertation that a performance provides an opportunity to enact particular cultural roles and structures.

After this introductory chapter, I examine some of the roles performance plays in constructing culture. I also consider two performance elements, narratives and visuals, that carry cultural patterns that help us make sense of the larger cultural structures at work. Next, I examine the work of Michel Foucault to provide a background for our examination of these performances. Foucault did much work with language structures and cultural codes. Foucault's writings help us understand how culture follows particular patterns—or codes—that emerge over and over again. His work was intent on breaking—or at least disrupting—the codes at hand in order to remain cognizant of the power exercised within and around our enactment of codes. I combine the study of performance and Foucault's examination of cultural and power structures in my
analysis of performance artifacts from Laurie Anderson, a prominent twentieth-
century performance artist. Finally, I draw conclusions for English studies to
consider, in relation to Foucauldian analysis and to performance as a structure to
identify communication instances.

My goal for my text is the use of performance as a tool for illustrating
cultural structures and conducting cultural inquiry. Performance provides
occasions to shape culture in perpetuating cultural codes or tearing down
cultural structures. What kind of performances do we enact as English scholars?
What kind of power structures do we support, challenge, or disrupt? I would
claim we are not fully aware of the cultural structures we support with our
discipline. My dissertation will help make clear some small elements of the
performances we enact and the cultural structures we build, as English scholars,
as rhetoricians, and as professional communicators.

In the rest of Chapter One, I first provide a brief overview of my
conceptualization of performance. Then I briefly describe Foucault's study of
language and how cultural inquiry stems from his theories. The chapter
concludes with an introduction of the artifact I plan to use and an examination
of the biases relevant to this study, which should expose the larger agenda(s) of
this work. Let me conclude this particular section with a brief overview of
postmodern thought.

My work in this dissertation takes its cue from postmodern sensibilities.
Definitions of postmodernism are numerous, but they retain a similarity: an
openness to possibility and/or multiplicity. Madan Sarup characterizes
postmodern societies as "media society, the society of the spectacle, consumer society, the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, [or] post-industrial society" (117). For David Harvey, postmodernism is "an onslaught of diverse possibilities" (39) that opens scholars up to "the foregrounding of questions as to how radically different realities may coexist, collide, and interpenetrate" (41). John Hassard calls the "most stark sense" of postmodernism its "frontal assault on methodological unity" (1). Hassard claims, "postmodern epistemology suggests that the world is constituted by our shared language and that we can only 'know the world' through the particular forms of discourse our language creates" (3). Postmodernism allows us to know the world in various and contradictory constructions, including our language. In this work I examine postmodern "knowing" through interpretations of performance, using Laurie Anderson's "radically different realities" enacted in her works as examples.

Postmodern thought processes must include recording those thoughts with a postmodern writing style. For Hassard, "the task of postmodern writing, therefore, is to recognize this elusive nature of language, but never with the aim of creating a meta-discourse to explain all language forms" (3). The task of my particular set of postmodern writings is to explore the elusive language we use to describe the ephemeral form of communication we call performance. What I establish in this dissertation pins down a small section of meaning about the concept of performance. The meaning I create then opens itself for more interpretation. Postmodern scholarship involves "a vast will to unmaking" (Hassan 92), which makes some scholars uneasy. We assume that, if we have
enough evidence to the contrary, we can "unmake" what has already been made. That lack of fixity unnerves writers, because their finished text is never finished. But the "vast will to unmaking" is, at its lowest level, another attempt at understanding revision. The text I create here has been made and unmade numerous times in its eighteen-month creation process. When I release the text as "finished," other scholars will do their own "unmaking" to this text to revise the meaning I put forth. This constant un/re/making of this document does not diminish its integrity. Instead, it allows this text to hold several different integrities, as defined by myself and my readers. Postmodernism's challenge is to grasp and maintain these integrities while, at the same time, allowing modification and change. What we see as fixed points/texts in one blink will become "new" texts in the next blink, and we must be prepared to adapt.

Postmodernism is not an easy theoretical position to maintain. It requires us to be ideological, critical, and willing to change. Bernard Brock, Robert Scott, and James Chesebro note "the postmodern critic maintains that all views are ideological, for a description [of anything] can only reflect the perceptual perspectives and biases of a particular symbol user in a given place at a specific time" (435). Staying alert to our "perceptual perspectives and biases" can be tiring and time-consuming, and involve much thought and struggle. According to Tyler:

Its [the postmodern perspective's] story-path is many-branched and labyrinth, beginnings and ends are forgotten, misplaced, merged, or interchanged. Its epiphany is out of sight and beyond light. . . .
light at the end of the tunnel is not utopia but New Jersey. Its discourses are LOCAL, IMMANENT, and INCOMMENSURABLE. No single tale tells the whole story of the absent whole and no method overcomes the difference of dis-solution. (82)

Deciding whether or not the light at the end of the tunnel is some utopia or New Jersey is up for discussion and argument.

Discussing postmodern thought is a useful entry to Foucault’s theories of language and culture. Foucault has been most often identified as a historian and a language scholar. His work aims to disrupt, interrupt, or corrupt the power structures at hand in order to foreground other power structures that may have been forgotten, pushed aside, or ignored. Foucault’s work is open to the multiplicitous readings postmodernism espouses, which makes his work alternately difficult and enlightening. Foucault’s work is useful to my study because he is interested in the codification of power and how power, persuasion, and preference are institutionalized with our language use. Our visual and verbal languages (codes in themselves) give us opportunities to create social structures with certain codified rules. Foucault examines these social structures for the codes embedded within them in order to challenge and disrupt those codes. His disruptions open the way for more possibilities of meaning and more distributions of power. Foucault argues for individual, postmodern realities, even if he does not use the term “postmodern.” Foucault notes, “the word ‘rationalization’ is a dangerous one. The main problem when people try to rationalize something is not to investigate whether or not they conform to
principles of rationality, *but to discover which kind of rationality they are using*" (PPC 59, italics added). His search for specific, individual rationalities and his demands for multiple interpretations place Foucault in the camp of postmodern scholars.

Foucault's postmodern language theories are central to this dissertation. However, the heart of my particular postmodern text lies in the concept of performance. If McNamara and Schechner are correct, and performance can encompass situations that are "ethnic and intercultural, historical and ahistorical, aesthetic and ritual, sociological and political," then performance is a postmodern concept in its openness to possibility. Elin Diamond argues that "to study performance is not to focus on completed forms, but to become aware of performance as itself a contested space, where meanings and desires are generated, occluded, and of course multiply interpreted" (4). The flexibility of performance makes it useful for understanding the various ways we interact with each other, and its mutability can describe many different social and cultural interactions. The combination of Foucault's linguistic openness and performance's flexible construction provides us with a useful postmodern base for examining communication. Postmodern realities are not about indeterminacy; rather, they are about possibility and construction. This dissertation begins the struggle of constructing new ways to examine performances we enact in American culture.
An overview of performance

At this point, I wish to provide a brief overview of the concept of performance. This overview includes a short examination of two performance elements I intend to incorporate into my analysis, namely narratives and visuals. I will explore performance in more detail in Chapter Two.

Creating a performance

Performance is not an umbrella term for communication. Instead, I would argue that performance is one of the complicated patterns humans can choose for communication. We recognize a performance based on particular combinations of situations, roles, and reactions from our audience(s). Somehow these combinations seem to be part of a "show," or a "demonstration." But these shows and demonstrations are flexible in their content and staging: a stage performance may consider the performance of the ordinary, and our everyday performance may be as carefully scripted as a Shakespearean drama. As a communication exchange, the elements of a performance are negotiated by those involved in the transaction. A performance can be a teacher teaching her class, a police officer writing a traffic ticket for an irate driver, an artist performing a song, or a politician giving a speech. Performative interaction is everywhere. Rhetoricians must frame a communicative instance as an active presentation of meaning and thus mark it as a performance. A performance is not a
performance until someone names it as such. The combination of roles seems planned and deliberate, designed to attract someone’s attention and enter the cultural milieu of meaning.

Diamond provides an explanation to encompass the movement of performance’s power:

Whether the performance of one’s gender on a city street, an orientalist impersonation in a Parisian salon, or a corporation-subsidized, “mediatized” Broadway show, each performance marks out a unique temporal space that nevertheless contains traces of other now-absent performances, other now-disappeared scenes. Which is to say . . . it is impossible to write the pleasurable embodiments we call performance without tangling with the cultural stories, traditions, and political contestations that comprise our sense of history. (1)

Though a performance is flexible in content and activity, it still uses a specific set of boundaries—one’s gender, a Broadway performance, or a boardroom meeting—that interacts with cultural influences. Performances complete many actions: a performance argues for our beliefs and our version of the world and provides us with a negotiated space for communication. The knowledge we create from both performing and watching performances is also flexible, and predicated on the changing contexts of the performance. The knowledge we gain from watching performances helps us understand our relationship to cultural, social, and political entities.
Two performance features

We begin to understand the performances around us through examining the communicative elements within those performances. Narratives and visuals are key to our understanding. Narratives and visuals illuminate the cultural relationships present in the performance. I choose to study narratives and visuals in this project because the artifact I wish to examine is constructed of both. Combining narratives and visuals in a performance is not a new technique, but it provides a more thought-provoking performance than narratives or visuals performed alone. Marie Maclean argues that narrative is “the alter ego” of performance (15). I insert visuals into that “alter ego” as well.

narratives in performance

Performances can involve stories, or at least a storyline. In general, performed narratives are used for two purposes. When an individual tells a story, she creates an argument using plot, characters, and storylines to help make her argument clear. Narrative is a recognized tradition in classical scholarship on argument and has been used as a tool in constructing arguments since Greeks and Romans argued in the city square. In addition, narrative appeals to the verisimilitude of life itself—narrative provides evidence of human empathy and commonality. She who performs a narrative is arguing, in the tradition of ancient rhetors and in the postmodern notion of “life is a performance.”
Narratives offer us a reason for performance. Narratives are the way we remain involved with each other—we tell each other stories to help each other understand various points of view. Jerome Bruner explores two different ways of knowing: the narrative way and the empirical, scientific way. He notes that both have their useful points in argument:

Each of the ways of knowing, moreover, has operating principles of its own and its own criteria of well-formedness. . . . A good story and a well-formed argument are different natural kinds. Both can be used as means for convincing another. . . . The one verifies by eventual appeal to procedures for establishing formal and empirical proof. The other establishes not truth but verisimilitude. (11)

I want to push Bruner's point of view much farther. Narrative can offer as much "truth" as empirical proof. If our world views are flexible, ever-changing, and varied from individual to individual, a story seems to establish as well-formed an argument as any other discursive construction. We can establish an argument with narrative precisely because stories offer us a point of connection with each other, and in that connection we can change others' minds. At this time in our history, where we rely on multiple interpretations of ideas to guide us, verisimilitude is "truth," and a reliable argument. Narratives may never get us to "formal and empirical proof," since they are generally individual viewpoints told by individuals about specific times, places, and events. In general, empirical proof requires observations, numbers, and repeated, validated experiments. But the performance of a story is a special kind of verisimilitude.
Shakespeare’s plays have survived for over four hundred years, in part because Shakespeare’s characters relate stories that make sense to us. These stories are “empirical proof” that humans in the sixteenth century worried about love or power and corruption. Narratives hold a special power for humans, because they establish “empirical proof” that humans have significant experiences that must be discussed. Narratives are the “empirical proof” that life is out there, that events do happen, and that we need to share our stories with each other to make sense of things. As Anne DiPardo argues, “the narrative urge is . . . just as important as knowledge gleaned through more systematically rational means. The process of understanding experience [through narrative] is informed by more rational, factual kinds of knowledge, and in turn informs such knowledge” (63).

Visuals, like narratives, play a role in performance. We read visuals as texts, gathering information from them, and we understand visuals as representations of specific systems of meaning. Visuals give us a chance to enhance, contradict, or disrupt our written and oral rhetoric. Visuals are not “add-ons” to other forms of communication. Visuals are integral to a complete picture of the communication instance. Visuals contain implicit and explicit messages, and either can be manipulated to convey a message. Paul Messaris claims visual understanding “is a prerequisite for the ability to see through the manipulative uses and ideological implications of visual images.”
Both implicit and explicit visual messages provide important information, and Messaris' claim is important for visuals in performance.

Visuals provide another potentially manipulative ideological text within a narrative. Some play-goers prefer (and claim to better understand) sets that "look like the play," or sets that seem to represent the writer's given setting for the play. However, Shakespeare's plays have been performed with sets that look like fifteenth-century Italy and sets that look like a jungle gym. Each staging of the play sends a particular kind of message about Shakespeare's work. The "real-world" set may indicate a desire to stick closely to Shakespeare's explicit messages, including his exploration of life in Renaissance Italy. The jungle-gym set may encourage us to explore the implicit messages in Shakespeare, such as the power relationships of the characters; the individual on the "top rung" of the jungle gym has visual and positional power over those characters on lower rungs. Visuals can convey messages that are explicitly explored within the narratives. Or, the visual messages can provide implicit meanings of the narrative. In either case, visuals serve to add another dimension to the performance's overall significance.

Visuals offer various levels of persuasion. A red circle with a diagonal line is a powerful visual representation of NO. A STOP sign is equally clear in communicating its argument. However, some visuals are less clearly persuasive. If a teacher is dressed casually, she may not seem to present the same authority to her class as she might if she wore a business suit. Consequently, her performance in the classroom might be affected by her lack of authority as
defined by her clothes. Visuals add emphasis to other rhetorical forms—our clothes contribute to our authority, which influences our other forms of persuasion. This visual complication of our communication makes visuals another display of our rhetorical abilities, our points of view, and our narratives.

In some cases, visuals illuminate the narratives contained in a performance, in both overt and covert ways. In the introduction to the book *Discourses: Conversations in Postmodern Art and Culture*, editor Marcia Tucker thanks an artist for adding his artwork to the pages: “Our gratitude also to John Baldessari for illustrating the book—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say ‘illuminating’ it—with his own work and thus creating a visual ‘text’ that parallels the discursive one” (2). Baldessari’s art does not explain the texts, nor does it contradict the texts. Instead, it “illuminates” the book with Baldessari’s visual versions of the cultural questions under consideration. Baldessari’s visual interpretation of the text allows readers to consider other points of view not contained in the narrative of the volume. The same holds true for visuals in performance. Visuals that are executed with thought and care provide more and different interpretations of a performance, thus adding more dimensions.

**Foucault, performance, and cultural inquiry**

Michel Foucault’s writings on culture and language use are useful for uncovering the multidimensionality of performance. Foucault’s organizing
concept of problematization helps us identify historic, linguistic, and cultural constructions that arise within performances. In this section I provide a general overview of Foucault's language explorations. I explore Foucault's ideas more thoroughly in Chapter Three.

**Foucault's language theories**

Foucault’s writing theorizes the social dimensions of language. He incorporates social structures and their corresponding power structures into his discussion of language and its effects on society. Brummett comments, “rhetoric, which is the struggle over meaning management, is thus also a struggle over which patterns to employ in making meaning. This struggle, this urging of patterns for ordering upon others, is derived from the social” (75). Foucault studies what Brummett posits as rhetoric: the social elements of the meaning-making struggle. Social elements influence the meanings derived from a performance, and Foucault is interested in those social influences as they are worked out through communication.

I ground my exploration of Foucault in his works that focus on communication, knowledge, and power. Throughout my exploration of Foucault, I focus on the relationship between the individual and her connection to knowledge and power. Connection and relationship are the keys to problematization, the concept I use to organize my analysis of my artifact. Foucault’s concept of problematization is derived from socially created
knowledge and power relationships; the idea is most clearly addressed in the three volumes of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. *The History of Sexuality, Part One* is a "problematization" as explored by Foucault; the book covers the power relationships that have constructed Western views on sexuality throughout history. Foucault posits "what is at issue [in Western discussions of sex], briefly, is the over-all 'discursive fact,' the way in which sex is 'put into discourse'" (11). In the same way, what is at issue in this dissertation is how our beliefs and arguments are "put into discourse," and how context affects our discourse. What we do and do not "put into discourse" relates to power and how power is exercised through social structures. When we pull apart what is "put into discourse," we begin to problematize.

Power is omnipresent in culture. According to Sarup, Foucault contends that "individuals are constituted by power relations, power being the ultimate principle of social reality" (81). How individuals take, give away, and maintain this power relationship with others is integral to how we form relationships between ideas. In *The History of Sexuality, Part One*, Foucault argues that to truly understand sex and sexuality in our culture requires "forming a different grid of historical decipherment" (90) than the one promoted by "power-sovereignty," (90) or the governing power structures. For Foucault, power is not a possession nor a capacity (Sarup 82). Rather, power shapes our understanding of the culture around us. Power is generated by institutions; it extends into the past and reaches into the future. The questions in the quotation below provide a
glimpse of the depth to which Foucault wants to probe culture for our power structures and the contexts from which our social/power structures arise:

What, in fact, are medicine, grammar, or political economy? Are they merely a retrospective regrouping by which the contemporary sciences deceive themselves as to their own past? Are they forms that have become established once and for all and have gone on developing through time? Do they conceal other unities? And what sort of links can validly be recognized between all these statements that form, in such a familiar and insistent way, such an enigmatic mass? (AK 31, italics in original)

These "enigmatic masses" are what I explore through my artifact. In her performances, Anderson pays close attention to the power structures that flow in, around, and through our culture. Foucault and his questions help me decipher Anderson's problematizations by providing insight into the connections between our discourse, our power structures, and our culture's reinforcement/creation/destruction of these power relationships.

**Foucault and cultural inquiry**

Performance provides us with the opportunity to view particular cultural constructions within the performance at hand, as I have previously indicated. Examining performances helps us grasp what cultural institutions, ideas, and codes are ensconced in our cultural knowledge, because these institutions and
ideas become evident in the performance. The roles we play and the things we say all relate back to culturally established patterns. Foucault’s goal, in all of his works, was the disruption of entrenched cultural orders. This disruption that permits new performances. According to Gary Gutting, “in examining psychiatry, medicine, the social sciences, and other contemporary disciplines, [Foucault’s] goal was always to suggest liberating alternatives to what seem to be inevitable conceptions and practices” (3). Gutting’s suggestion of “liberating alternatives” is the juncture at which Foucault and performance come together.

Illuminating the cultural structures that inform performances provides a way to understand performances as social and/or cultural events, based in and predicated from previously established social entities. Once we are explicit about these social structures in our performances, in any given instance, we can make more conscious choices. With our choices of what to include and exclude we can create new performances that may be more liberating, more useful, or more accurate than the previous ones. Once we’ve created new performances, we run the risk of entrenching our newly performed cultural structures, repeating the cycle. However, we now have practice in identifying and disrupting our cultural structures—we can do it again. Once we are cognizant of the cultural structures we use in our performances, we are free to rearrange those cultural structures to suit our performative needs.

In his preface to The Order of Things, Foucault provides an extended meditation on the function of social structures. Foucault calls these structures
codes, and refers to cultural codes in several places in his texts. Foucault claims we learn how to interact in society through these structures:

The fundamental codes of a culture—those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices—establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home. At the other extremity of thought, there are the scientific theories or the philosophical interpretations which explain why order exists in general . . . But between these two regions, so distant from one another, lies a domain which . . . is nonetheless fundamental: it is more confused, more obscure, and probably less easy to analyse. It is here that a culture, imperceptively deviating from the empirical orders prescribed for it by its primary codes, instituting an initial separation from them, causes them [the original codes] to lose their original transparency, relinquishes its immediate and invisible powers, frees itself sufficiently to discover that these orders [the original codes] are perhaps not the only possible ones or the best ones . . . . (xx)

Our cultural inquiry begins when we look at the "fundamental domain" between our cultural codes/structures and scientific truths. This intermediate space is significant. In this space, a culture's codes—and scientific truths, for that matter—can be interrupted, tested, and reinterpreted, which is important for understanding the available possibilities of culturally accepted "orders". Foucault
argues further, “it is on the basis of this newly perceived order [in this intermediate space] that the codes of language, perception, and practice are criticized and rendered partially invalid” (xxi). What happens to these codes becomes anyone’s guess, but “thus, between the already ‘encoded’ eye and reflexive knowledge there is a middle region which liberates order itself” (xxi). According to Foucault, this middle ground lets codes and theories combine into new ideas in “the pure experience of order and of its modes of being” (xxi). We are never free from these social structures/codes, but we are free to create new communicative structures—in my explorations, new performances—with the codes we have.

Foucault is important to my text because of his willingness to challenge cultural power structures. When we examine new constructions of performance, we must retain a flexibility to use cultural entities for our own purposes; this flexibility will allow for new performances to be created. We must retain our choice to use a jungle-gym set for Shakespeare’s As You Like It, even if the audience prefers a historically appropriate set. Foucault’s desire to see our communication as power-laden, historically appropriate, and culturally determined is useful for performance. We can use Foucault’s tactics of “digging out” culturally embedded constructions to more fully understand the performances we enact. Foucault’s concept of problematization, which I explore in Chapter Three, enacts this challenge to established cultural entities by uncovering the connections between them.
At this point, I have provided brief descriptions of performance and Foucault’s language theories. I combine these elements in further chapters, culminating in an analysis of my artifact in Chapter Four. In the rest of this chapter, I address my particular reasons for constructing this dissertation in the way I have. Declaring my biases helps make clear the "intellectual project" of this dissertation and what may happen to it (and me) as I continue my academic career.

**Personal biases and motivations**

Obviously, this dissertation does not arise from a vacuum. I have very personal reasons for writing it, including these two biases: I am a fan of Anderson’s, and I believe in interdisciplinary research. I touch on each of these biases here so the reader is aware of the perspectives I bring to this project. Writing this dissertation is a risk, in several ways. Exploring these biases may help explain (to me, as well) why I decided to take these risks.

**Anderson's artistic and scholarly appeal**

I have been a fan of Laurie Anderson’s work since I was twenty. The first Anderson performance I saw (live or recorded) was Home of the Brave, so it seems appropriate to return to it in this text. In 1990, as I watched Home of the
Brave, I began to take notes, something I do not do for films. Taking notes was a sign of my captivation. Anderson’s work immediately intrigued me. Its quirky points of view, its concern for the use of language, and its humorous takes on American culture made her work different and captivating. Her ability to “take apart” the ordinary to reveal the extraordinary was, for me, an enviable talent. Her ability to poke fun at culture was equally enviable. Sometimes Anderson’s humor emphasized the sharp, serious side of her argument, whatever it might be, which made the humor even more effective. Janet Kardon claims Anderson is in the tradition of American humorists who are whimsical, yet sharp and dark: as Kardon puts it, Anderson’s humor is “oblique [and] brightly sinister” (137). The oblique, sinister side of Anderson’s work was enchanting. In the middle of my first viewing of Home of the Brave, I knew I had to explore Anderson’s work more thoroughly.

Anderson’s haunting, elegant use of language was an initial point of interest for me. Anderson’s narratives are always compelling, and they establish her keen observational powers. She is a consummate “culture watcher” who spins her observations into stories, then proceeds to deliver them on stage. The electronic wizardry with which she augments her stories make her one of the most effective yet eclectic storytellers of the twentieth century. Her ability to spin narratives points out her conscious concern with and for how humans use language. Her fascination with language is apparent in the themes that appear in her work: human relationships, the relationship of authority to “the people,” and the alterity of the world. Anderson calls language play “always two things
switching,” which recalls the postmodern idea of submerged terms; no matter what is at the fore, the opposite is just a turn of the coin away. Anderson’s concern for language is evident in the way she performs. Most of her “concerts” could be called “lectures” or “presentations.” Very often she talks as much as she sings. Anderson acknowledges the paradox involved with her language study—language, her medium of choice for creating her art, is precisely what she tries to understand with her work.

Anderson’s visuals are as interesting and complex as her narratives, and her visual props reflect her preoccupation with language. Often, Anderson projects words behind her as she tells her stories. Even if she is on stage with only her equipment, her presence is visually intriguing. Her electronic equipment creates a kind of fortress around her. Anderson is aware that no other performance artist is quite like her, and she uses that fact to her advantage, especially in her visual presentation. No current performance artist has the same kind of visual presence that Anderson does. At the same time, when Anderson chooses to complicate her sets with other visuals, the effect is striking. TV sets the size of refrigerators tumble across her back projection screen, and photographs of subways at 3 a.m. become the size of billboards. No other current performance artist uses such complex, digital, and creative sets—when she uses sets. Anderson is trained as a sculptor, and her formal training seems to encourage the deliberate arrangement of her stage equipment, her costume(s), and her back-screen projections.
Anderson’s narratives and visuals are carefully prepared for maximum impact. Her visual projections are large, and boldly drawn or printed; her narratives are thought-provoking and unusual. Anderson’s presentations seem carefully “matched”. Nothing seems random. Her narratives and visuals are integrated carefully, to produce an intense viewing experience. The concentrated, focused feel of Anderson’s work contributes to her appeal, in my mind: I like artists to be passionate about their work. While Anderson doesn’t exhibit much passion per se—she is often accused of being too self-possessed and detached—the power of her work is evident in her carefully orchestrated combination of unusual and striking narratives and visuals.

Chapter Four presents my perspective on Anderson’s film *Home of the Brave*. I realize there are many more interpretations besides my own that are valid. However, this dissertation is a step in creating a space for all of those interpretations. My appreciation for Anderson’s work creates a blind side to my vision; I tend to think everyone loves her pieces as much as I do. Anderson has critics, as all artists do. However, her commercial and critical success as an artist leads me to believe she has worth in other fields of communication, including my own. I intend this dissertation to encourage more explorations of art and art works by scholars in communication studies. Art provides us with an important cultural perspective, one whose surface has been barely touched by those outside art history and criticism. One chapter on Anderson’s work, tucked into a dissertation from an English scholar, will pave the way for more explorations of
Interdisciplinary pushes on the boundary

My desire to explore art as communication leads me to my second bias, which is my preference for interdisciplinary work. This dissertation draws from several different fields of inquiry, including speech communication, professional communication, rhetoric, anthropology, sociology, and art history. My formal academic training hits on several areas within communication study, including rhetorical theory and history, public address, technical writing, business writing, poetry, and literature. As a scholar, I am a walking example of interdisciplinary work, and a talking example of someone who challenges the boundaries of English studies. I claim the distinctions, despite their problems. Combining fields of inquiry can lead to problematic texts which may have seemingly diluted theories, stylistic incompatibilities, or other trouble spots. While working on this text, I took significant methodological and stylistic advice from a colleague in another discipline. That advice was less than successful in the eyes of my primary audience, who are English studies scholars, thus necessitating major changes in this manuscript. Disciplinary combinations require much research, many careful hours of writing, and many reviews of acceptable/accepted combinations of conventions, styles, and ideas. A casual attempt to mesh
theories or sentence structure preferences can result in scholarship that is not acceptable to anyone, in any discipline.

Despite my difficulties with this document, I continue to believe in interdisciplinary scholarship, and I will continue to campaign for an expansion of the boundaries of English studies. I argue that, in general, we instead encounter new and different perspectives, rather than slipshod scholarship, when disciplines (and theories) are meshed. In his introduction to *The Rhetorical Turn*, Herbert W. Simon argues that, in an expanded arena of rhetorical inquiry, "in place of Method, there is talk of methods: variable, creative, nonalgorithmic" (2). Bernard Brock, Robert Scott, and James Chesebro claim "the critical impulse is universal" (10), not limited to any particular scholar, but expanded to include scholarship of any kind. This dissertation has no Method similar to the one Simon invokes. Instead, its plurality of "methods of understanding" provide insight into performance scholarship, Foucault's language philosophies, narrative theory, visual rhetoric, and Anderson's art, including the combination of various elements I use here. I prefer to assume scholars can augment each other's knowledge rather than fight for methodological control. Our fighting isolates us in a ever-shrinking intellectual community. Carol Berkenkotter states, "surely [graduate students in composition] will need to draw from diverse disciplines and methodologies to extend their knowledge (and ours) of how language users acquire their 'ways with words' in multicultural and multidisciplinary contexts" (166). Why just composition graduate students? Why not all of us?
Pushing on the boundaries of my profession relates clearly to interdisciplinary work. Interdisciplinary research challenges where the boundary lines of English studies are drawn. English departments can and should include more and different kinds of rhetorical theory and rhetorical history, including ones generally taught in speech departments. Departments are beginning that shift towards rhetorical inclusivity, but the change is slow, and converts are reluctant. Two significant examples of that inclusivity is the ease with which particular textbooks pass through the boundary between speech and English departments. Sonja K. Foss's *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice* and Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg's *Rhetorical Tradition* are used in both departments to teach rhetorical practice and the history of rhetorical thought. As these texts are, I am a sort of "ambassador" between the speech and English worlds. I have taught in speech departments and English departments, and have had success in both places. I have presented papers at national conferences of both disciplines. I am pleased to use all of my training, as a rhetor, writer, public speaker, historian, and literary critic.

Pushing the boundaries of English studies broadens more than just English scholars. James Berlin cites an instance where an English department at a major university offers its undergraduates "a socially and politically useful" curriculum. A department member notes "[students] can do a degree in creative writing while taking classes in cultural studies, feminist studies, film studies and professional writing. They can take a class in journalism, while doing one in Shakespeare, another in advertising, and another dealing with the way in which
the portrayal of the erotic in film has been influenced by the discourse on AIDS" (in Berlin 150). Students in this program may be more well-rounded, well-informed consumers of communication than their colleagues at other universities. When these students leave school, they will be used to an inclusionary viewpoint, at least in communication studies, which will serve them well as we enter the global community of the twenty-first century. This interdisciplinary, multimodal approach to an English degree is not the norm—but it should be.

These two biases arise from a common desire I have to make my personal scholarship exciting, new, and useful to someone other than myself. In that quest I often make my scholarship more complicated than necessary. However, my short academic career has given me multiple perspectives on communication disciplines, and these varied perspectives have proved useful in my teaching, research, and professional experiences. I expect my future scholarship to continue this pattern of inter/multidisciplinary work. The struggle for accuracy, the audience constraints, and the time consumption all become frustrating—and ones that I could eliminate from my work, should I decide to stick to one clearly defined subject area for my research. But the benefits of interdisciplinary research last much longer than the frustration does.
An overview of this text

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter One serves as the introduction to the work as a whole and the specific elements of analysis involved. Chapter Two provides an in-depth examination of performance studies, narrative studies, and visual theory. Chapter Three explains the significance of language, power, and interaction, in relation to performance and cultural codes, through the theories of Michel Foucault. Chapter Four analyzes Laurie Anderson's film performance *Home of the Brave* and the cultural codes it disrupts and challenges. Chapter Five provides the implications of my work, both with Anderson and with the combination of performance and cultural codes, and suggestions for future research.

I wish to make this project as "thick" as possible. The notion of "thick research" follows our field's movement toward "the interpretive turn" described by anthropologists. Geertz characterizes his own work as a combination of practices and processes within that turn towards interpretation, and that is how I see my own work. Geertz comments that his volume *Local Knowledge* is a collection of essays that represent this combination of approaches to American culture:

The figurative nature of social theory, the moral interplay of contrasting mentalities, the practical difficulties in seeing things as others see them, the epistemological status of common sense, the revelatory power of art, the symbolic construction of authority, the clattering variousness of modern intellectual life, and the
relationship between what people take as fact and what they regard
as justice are treated, one after the other, in an attempt somehow to
understand how it is we understand understandings not our own.
("Introduction" 5)

My exploration of performance, Foucault, and Anderson is my current attempt
to "understand understandings not our own." The understandings I pursue in
this text are those of a woman performance artist and a gay French intellectual,
twentieth century emissaries of new perspectives on their respective fields of art
and philosophy/history. This dissertation is a "thick description" which
combines theories, crosses boundaries, and works with our knowledge-building
skills. Having this kind of conversation is, as Rorty argues, a way of seeing the
process of knowing. It is a conversation about understanding(s). Rorty claims:

If we see knowing not as having an essence, to be described by
scientists or philosophers, but rather as a right, by current standards,
to believe, then we are well on the way to seeing conversation as
the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood.
Our focus shifts from the relation between human beings and the
objects of their inquiry to the relation between alternative standards
of justification, and from there to the actual changes in those
standards which make up intellectual history. (389-90, italics in
original)
My dissertation is a conversation about our life's performances, and how they allow us to better understand the cultural codes we follow. The conversation is open to anyone who wants to join me.

The story that ends this chapter demonstrates the embeddedness of the concepts I will examine in the following chapters. In it, I relate a narrative (a text) about a performance that includes narrative and visual texts. In that performance, Laurie Anderson shapes her discourse to reflect power structures she sees within language structures and our responses to them; in fact, the story I transcribe here is about power structures in language. My narrative also presents the complexity in something that seems simple; the story appears to be about nothing more than something I did on a Saturday night. Yet it is best understood through the theories I struggle with in this dissertation. Telling the story of Anderson's concert seems a fitting way to end this introduction to the complexity of performance.

February 1997

I have been waiting for this night for a long time—almost seven years, to be exact. On New Year's Day 1997, when I found out Laurie Anderson would perform in St. Paul, Minnesota, I immediately bought a ticket, no questions asked, price be damned. I had been using her work in my academic projects since I entered graduate school. Here was my chance to see her again, in the middle of my biggest project! I haven't seen her perform since 1990, before I began my
graduate studies. I was just an artistically interested undergraduate then; now I'm a "professional scholar" of her work.

I entice my friend Joel, another fan, and his wife Mary Beth, to come with me to the show. The piece is billed as "The Speed of Darkness," and is described in ads as "a collection of stories and songs about the future of art and technology." Anderson is talking about things she's talked about before, but I can't wait to see her new ideas for exploring these old themes. I know she began this tour—which seems to be intermittent—in July 1996. I feel lucky that she's finally close enough that I can see a show. I wish there was a chance for an interview, but I will have to content myself with taking copious notes during the show (which I hope I'll be able to read later!).

The evening finally arrives. The auditorium at the College of St. Catherine is small and holds maybe seven hundred people, but it is full to bursting for this show. Anderson doesn't always play venues this small, and if this tour is as intermittent as it seems to be, we are lucky she is here. A small college theatre like this is easily skipped when you're a world-famous performance artist. When I enter, I see die-hard fans (how do I know them? They're talking about other times they've seen her, or their favorite pieces), other artists, biker chicks, the coffee-house set, and St. Catherine's students trying for extra credit points in a theatre or music class. The audience mix is interesting to me, and not quite what I'd expected (thanks to the biker chicks). At this point in her career, Anderson has been performing for over twenty years, and she has quite a loyal following. Many of her fans didn't discover her until 1983, when
her magnum opus United States Parts I-V was released on a multi-LP set. But people seemed to take to the quirky, unusual stories that made up United States. It was art, performed with technological wizardry, that people could understand (or at least think about) and relate to themselves. When her film, Home of the Brave, hit the small, arty theatres in 1986, her fan base grew even more. Anderson has done more “public” things, like interviews for National Public Radio during the 1992 presidential election, and public service announcements on TV in New York City, but her strength has always been her live performances. She may garner new fans at this performance. The St. Catherine’s students may decide they like her.

The audience seems ready to see her, because when she steps on stage the cheers are loud and sustained. Joel and I are clapping loudly; this is Joel’s first time to witness Anderson in performance, and he is excited. Anderson smiles, in her ethereal way, then closes her eyes and picks up her violin. I begin scribbling, even though she has said and done nothing—not yet, anyway. I want to record as much of the atmosphere as possible. I almost tried to sneak in a tape recorder to make my own bootleg, but decided against it. I may be desperate for dissertation help, but I’m not a law-breaker yet. I look up when the first sound issues from the almost-floating figure on stage.

Enormous electronic moans fill the air. The music is louder than the cheers were, and seems to completely fill the space around us. The sound is not like anything we’ve heard before: it’s the sound of an electronic animal, wounded and calling for help. It seems amazing Anderson can make so much
sound with so little equipment. The stage is simply set, compared to her previous performances and concert tours. Tonight she uses two synthesizers, a few microphones and vocoders, plus some control equipment. She looks small in comparison to the sounds she makes. The audience seems instantly taken in by her slight form, clad in white, making such an eerie sound. From the first pass of her bow across her violin strings, we are her rapt subjects.

Her haunting electronic music envelops the concert hall and moves the audience into her performance. She begins to talk about technology, then personal relationships, and then she tells this story:

It was up in Canada, and it was August, but very cold. I had been staying on this Cree Indian reservation for a few days, just sort of hanging around. One day, some anthropologists showed up at the reservation. They came in a little plane with maple leaves painted on the wings. They said they were there to shoot a documentary of the Cree Indians. They set up their video equipment in a tin Quonset hut next to the Hudson Bay Company. Then they asked the oldest man on the reservation to come and sing some songs for their documentary. On the day of the taping, the old man arrived. He was blind and wearing a red plaid shirt. They turned on some lights and he started to sing. But he kept starting over and sweating. Pretty soon it was clear that he didn't really know any of the songs. He just kept starting over and sweating and rocking back and forth. The only words he really seemed sure of were "Hey ah . . . hey ah hey . . . hey hey hey ah hey . . . hey . . ."

Hey ah hey hey hey ah hey
I am singing the songs.
Hey ah hey ah hey
the old songs . . . but I can't remember the words of the songs.
hey hey hey ah hey
the old hunting songs.

I am singing the songs of my fathers and of the animals
they hunted down.
Hey hey hey ah hey
I never knew the words of the old songs.
Hey hey ah hey hey hey hey ah hey
I never went hunting.
Hey hey ah ah hey ah hey
I never sang the songs
Hey ah hey
of my fathers.
Hey hey ah hey
I am singing for this movie;
Hey ah
I am doing this for money.
Hey hey ah hey
I remember Grandfather;
he lay on his back while he was dying.
Hey ah hey hey ah hey
I think I am no one.

Hey hey ah hey hey.  (*United States Part Three*, n.p.)
A barely audible murmur runs through the crowd when she begins; some of them know this story. It is from Anderson’s United States, the eight-hour piece that made her name in performance art. But I know I don’t mind hearing it live; I wasn’t at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1983, when she first performed it. I’ve heard it on tape, but that’s it. Joel and I look at each other, with a look that says “Oh, we know this!” She finishes her Cree Indian piece, and the audience applauds loudly. She could re-do all of her old pieces, with or without new musical accompaniment, and no one would care. No matter how long ago they discovered Anderson, her fans hang on every word out of her mouth and every sound from her violin and keyboard. They like the new works. But, for those who know them, the old pieces are still powerful, and worth hearing again.

We continue to listen intently. Anderson doesn’t stop: either she is talking, telling stories, or she is playing. No one realizes, when she’s done, that her performance has been 90 minutes long. She won’t come back for an encore, no matter how hard we clap. It’s not her style. Finally, people stand up and begin talking about what they’ve seen. They say, “Was that really 90 minutes? Wow. I could have sworn she was on stage for half an hour.” Joel and I look at each other. He says, “Did you get some information for your dissertation?” I look at him and say “What do you think? I ran out of paper.” We both grin broadly, and leave the theatre.

This story of Anderson’s performance illustrates many cultural structures
and power relationships at work. Our roles during the performance are
determined by how we have been taught to act in such a situation. Anderson
acts as an “artist,” partially because she is on stage and partially because of her
audience’s knowledge of her artistic background. Anderson performs “Laurie
Anderson,” the public persona she has created for herself, the one who creates
technology and writes stories to make “Laurie Anderson’s art.” She has been
given the power of visionary and cultural arbiter because she is part of the “art
world,” a place our culture imbues with power. We would not expect her to act
as a firefighter or a research chemist because we do not know her as such; if she
would, her audience would assume she was using those professions as characters
for a performance. Anderson also invokes ideology-laden cultural codes with her
narrative: Native Americans are a lost people, native culture is becoming
invisible, native people will do anything for money, native cultures should be
saved on videotape. These ideas conflict in her narrative. Anderson’s choice to
juxtapose them is painful, in some ways, because it creates a reality we may not
want to face. However, the juxtaposition also allows us to make decisions about
which ideas to foreground, which ideas to ignore, and which ideas to disrupt or
disagree with.

We who witnessed this performance are “audience members” because of
our decision to sit and watch Anderson for ninety minutes. We sit quietly, in
respectful silence, for the time we are given to witness her work. We clap loudly
at the end, asking for an encore. We do not dance, sing, or shout, as we might at
another kind of concert. We have been culturally taught to behave as
thoughtful, respectful connoisseurs of intellectual art. As audience members, we are free to question the conclusions of the artist, but we are not to show any outward signs of disagreement or disrespect, such as booing. However, I heard no questioning of Anderson in the conversations around me after the concert. No one said, “Gee, why did she repeat herself?” Rather, the audience members exclaimed “Wow, she did the Cree Indian piece! I’m so glad!” Whether or not we agree, we are trained to show respect for artists and their artistic judgment.

This analysis of the cultural roles at work within Anderson and her audience is, of course, my personal, singular summary. What does the woman sitting in the front row think? What is the man sitting in the back of the balcony thinking? Are these individuals considering Anderson’s performance as an intersection of particular cultural roles, or cultural institutions, or power relations? I would guess they are not. However, I assume they are thinking of how Anderson’s current work fits with the rest of her pieces, or how they have heard the Cree story before. Other audience members have not named their thoughts as a consideration of cultural forces and performed roles, but they are considering some of the same issues I am. What I discuss in the rest of this dissertation is not esoteric knowledge. I simply frame our average, ordinary considerations of communication as performances, and then I carefully consider the power structures at work in forming those performances. We all do that—but rarely with the scholarly focus I use here. This brief glimpse of an Anderson performance contains all the elements of communication I wish to talk about in this manuscript: performance, narratives, visuals, language structures, power
relationships, and Laurie Anderson. Together, these elements make a presentation of meaning, a space of argument, a space for questions. And we have many questions to ask.
CHAPTER TWO: 
THEORETICAL POSITIONS OF PERFORMANCE

Indeed, postmodern notions of performance embrace what Plato condemned in theatrical representation—its non-originality—and gesture toward an epistemology grounded not on the distinction between truthful models and fictional representations but on different ways of knowing and doing that are constitutively heterogeneous, contingent, and risky. (Diamond 1)

Diamond's quotation indicates how complex performance can be. Performance theory has roots in many different academic traditions, including the very beginnings of the rhetorical tradition. Portions of performances, including narrative theory and visual theory, are also part of my vision of performance. Performance's status as a "risky" activity piques the interest of cultural scholars. For me, the flexibility of performance provides an avenue for the exploration of how humans share narratives and visuals.

In this chapter I explore performance theory, narrative theory, and visual theory, including how these topics fit within our conceptions of rhetoric. I first explain performance theory and its importance to this project. Then I discuss performance studies in relation to the rhetorical tradition, especially the traditions of sophistic rhetoric and epideictic speaking. Next I consider how narrative theory and visual theory fit into the rhetorical tradition and how both have grown to influence other theories, including performance theory.
Narratives and visuals are the most relevant texts in my artifact, which is why I choose to focus on them here. At the end of Chapter Two, the connections between performance theory, narrative texts, and visual texts are established.

**An overview of performance theory**

Performance theory can, in part, encompass the theory of stage performances, such as plays and concerts. While that strand of performance theory has relevance here, I concentrate my attention in the postmodern, “everyday” arena of performance. What shall emerge from this discussion of performance is a more extensive view of cultural performance. According to performance scholars Carol Simpson Stern and Bruce Henderson, performance incorporates “a whole field of human activity” (3). Stern and Henderson explain:

[Performance] embraces a verbal act in everyday life or a staged play, a rite of invective played in urban streets, a performance in the Western traditions of high arts, or a work of performance art. It includes cultural performances such as personal narratives ... or more communal forms of ceremony—the National Democratic Convention ... or a bullfight. It also includes literary performance, the celebration of individual genius, and conformity to Western definitions of art. In all cases a *performance act*, *interactional* in nature and involving *symbolic forms* and *live bodies*,
provides a way to constitute meaning and to affirm individual and cultural values. (3, italics in original)

The sweep of culture Stern and Henderson indicate is highly typical in descriptions of performance. No one can seem to agree, exactly, on what constitutes a performance. Performances are many things at many different times and places. Scholars agree, however, that performance is significant to human communication, in part *as a means of debating cultural constructions.* The inclusion of cultural constructs, and of argument, is essential to my definition of performance. The text and contexts we choose allow us to include various cultural constructions in our performances. What we choose to include determines what we debate.

Performance theories are a crazyquilt of ideas. I discuss some facets of performance studies here to ground my discussion of performance, text, and context. What I offer here augments the definition of performance as an act of showing. This overview of performance studies will help us understand how text and context come to shape performances.

**The plays of performance**

Performance theory is an interdisciplinary field with many strands of influence. The elements I choose for my focus—text, context, the idea of showing—fit with Stern and Henderson's textbook definition, but there is much
more to performance than those features. I argue, as do other scholars, that performances provide a negotiated space for communication.

According to Fine and Speer, disciplines that contribute to performance theory include sociology, anthropology, linguistics, theatre, folklore, and communication studies (3). Strine, Long, and HopKins argue that "research in interpretation and performance studies focuses on the constitutive elements of texts, performers, and audiences, individually or in some combination, in order to advance understanding of the aesthetic, psychological, historical, sociocultural, and political dimensions of performance" (181). Sayre argues that performance dislocates the constitutive elements of texts and makes them "free" from fixed meaning. Performance allows us "to un-fix the text by speaking it, and in speaking it to open the audience to new possibilities, new understandings" (192). Strine, Long, and HopKins and Sayre argue the same concept: performance allows meaning to move around, in and through cultural ideas, so we may see different sides of those ideas. Performance can be a way to redefine culture. As performers "un-fix" texts, they are free to "re-fix" new meanings to those same texts.

Strine, Whitaker, and HopKins note that part of the definition of performance includes contest and struggle: "Performance, like art and democracy... [is an] essentially contested concept, meaning that its very existence is bound up in disagreement about what it is, and that the disagreement over its essence is itself part of that essence" (183). Their guidelines for performance scholarship follow from the notions of treating performances
"as strategic sites of cultural formation and context embedded within, though not wholly determined by, a network of social, economic, and political contingencies" (192). Though they establish no hard and fast definitions of performance, they place performance in the realm of culture and politics. They remind us that part of performance is an argument over the nature of the term.

HopKins provides an explication of performance in her article "The Performance Turn—And Toss":

Performance negotiates not only the performer's relation to the role but the nature of the performance site. In a recent essay ... I argued that audience, both spectators and researchers, construe various kinds of sites for performance, such as ... cultural memory, ... participatory ritual, ... [and] as social commentary. These categories are negotiations between performer and performed, performer and audience, perhaps even between participating performers. The categories are construed, not given. Not everyone experiencing the performance will construe the site in the same way. (233)

An operable definition of performance is dependent on what we wish to include in our performances. We could include HopKins' "cultural memory" and Sayre's "free" meanings. We could add in art and politics. We can include aesthetics, psychology, history, sociology. I suggest we can add elements to our performances ad infinitum. All performances are different and, in HopKins' words, "constructed categories."
Combining ideas provides a negotiated definition of active communication. Negotiation is important: a negotiated definition seem to be more workable than fixed definitions for an entity as slippery as performance. If we allow for negotiation, performance may be anything from the President’s inaugural address to a classroom lecture. Performance can be an artistic endeavor, such as a play, a party, a children’s play group, or a board meeting. Fine opens one of her book chapters with the words “Performance is basic to humanity . . .” (23). She explores the metaphors involved in preaching within the traditional black church. Fine’s study of preaching utilizes the same performance theory we might use to study a board meeting. Both communicative instances are active sites of argument. Both involve cultural norms and cultural constraints that affect the communication enacted there.

Performance and cultural impact

Performances are how we make our culture, remember it, transmit it to others, and learn what is appropriate. Fine and Speer argue the power of performance has to do with both memory and creation: “the power of performance to create, store, and transmit identity and culture lies in its reflexive nature. Through performance, human beings not only present behavior . . . but they reflexively comment on it and the values and situations it encompasses. . . . Performance, then, as poesis, makes or constitutes cultural identity as well as
imitates it” (8-9). Turner maintains this perspective on the cultural power of performance:

For me, the anthropology of performance is an essential part of the anthropology of experience. In a sense, every type of a cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony, carnival, theatre, and poetry, is explanation and explication of life itself. . . . through the performance process itself, what is normally sealed up, inaccessible to everyday observation and reasoning, in the depth of sociocultural life, is drawn forth— (13)

Turner sees a magnitude of life force in performance. Here we find the very depths of what it means for us to be alive. Though Turner lists aesthetic or theatrical performances as "cultural performances," I expand the definition to include events such as everyday social or business interactions. Turner argues, "social life, then, even in its apparently quietest moments, is characteristically 'pregnant' with social dramas" (11). Social dramas are enacted through conversations, poetry readings, or staged performances. These social dramas, given to us as occasions for performance, represent the places in culture where we have the chance to perform our arguments. Others evaluate our performances and our arguments; we, in turn, evaluate theirs. Through this exchange of points of view, culture is made and remade.

Performance is a biological, as well as social, event. Anthropologist Richard Schechner moves performance one step closer to an elemental life force when he suggests that performance affects our autonomic nervous system (344-
367). When an actor performs a particular emotion, his autonomic nervous system reacts as if the actor feels that emotion without performative motivation. This tendency suggests that we may be "hard-wired" to perform as well as we spontaneously feel and act. Schechner argues "human adaptability is nowhere better demonstrated than in our stunning capacity to lie, simulate, pretend, imagine—to make art, especially performative art, that cannot be distinguished from the real [emotion] even at the level of ANS response" (363).

**Argument, culture, performance**

I have advanced the argument that performances are flexible, negotiable, spaces. The negotiation done within a performance is, in essence, an argument. The action of performance provides a way to argue for a certain set of beliefs. In watching and evaluating others' performances, we learn how to form these arguments: we evaluate what seems persuasive in terms of visual and verbal communication, and we see how the visual and verbal are combined to make the arguments. We know more the next time we argue from our own performances. Arguments become our action in the world, a time for us to set out our beliefs and opinions. Turner notes that "action is 'agonistic,'" (103), in the sense that "work and play both have this driving, conflictive character" (103). Our performances may or may not seem agonistic to our audience. No matter what, we are still arguing, and promoting a set of beliefs we feel to be accurate,
necessary, or important. Performance provides the opportunity to share and promote our beliefs with others.

The argument made with/in a performance is a combination of the text and context included in the performance plus the text/context an interpreter brings to the instance. The creator and the interpreter of the performance may attribute different arguments to the event, and they may leave the performance with different views of whether the arguments were successful. The performance remains a negotiated event. Schieffelin argues: “the work of a performance, what it does and how it does it, can never be discovered only by examining the text, or the script, or the symbolic meanings embodied in the ritual alone. . . . because [performance] is a reality apart from its participants . . . the participants may not all experience the same significance of efficacy from it” (293). Even though each participant may achieve different understanding and significance from a performance, depending on the interpretation each participant takes from the instance. Each individual has the chance to explore connections between cultural elements and the force of those elements within the text and context of the performance.

Turner’s previous argument regarding performance and the anthropology of experience provides the connection needed to make a performance happen. The “sealed up” resources “drawn forth” in communication become the connections we struggle with during our performance. With our texts and contexts, we argue for links between cultural institutions, we debate our political beliefs, and we clash in our convictions about social norms. Performance artist
Louise Ethel Lillefeldt characterizes the link between performance interpreters (performers, audience members) and argument in this way:

When people want to come and see me, I feel that I actually want to give them something back. There is an exchange and when this exchange doesn’t happen it’s not equal. I am being confrontational—it’s not just a room with no one in it. I am in it and I am here and this is work for me, but you are going to do some work also, you’re going to feel something too. You will know if I’m not being real and I will know the same about you. (86)

The “work” she describes is sharing arguments, even though her audience may have less chance to share and argue than she does. Lillefeldt’s definition of performance is a give and take between interpreters. She does the showing in her performance, and Lillefeldt shows her audience her interpretation of life. At the same time, her audience members do the work of interpreting what she’s interpreted. This interaction is essential to performance.

No scholar can completely define performance. As a larger discipline, performance studies involves examining angles of various performance theories for the validity they hold for the situation at hand. At this moment, performance studies provides a starting point for examining the arguments within Laurie Anderson’s art. Argument within a performance and the social construction of performance are not new to the twentieth century. The rhetorical tradition has explored these concepts since ancient Greek and Roman
orators made the worst argument appear the greater. Philosopher and novelist Jostein Gaarder believes: "the Sophists raise[d] the question of what was natural and what was socially induced" (63, italics in original). Next I explore the rhetorical tradition, focusing specifically on the sophistic and epideictic traditions, to explain how performance theory relates to the larger canon of rhetoric.

**Early rhetorical traditions—the roots of performance**

Establishing ties between performance and the ancient philosophical traditions of sophistic rhetoric, including epideictic rhetoric, is critical to my study. The rhetorical tradition is the foundation of all communication disciplines. Rhetoric is the baseline at which communication disciplines may claim a similarity.

I examine both sophistic rhetoric and epideictic rhetoric in this section. The two do not have to be linked; epideictic rhetoric does not have to be considered part of the sophistic tradition. I choose to see epideictic rhetoric as sophistic rhetoric because of the contextuality of the traditions. Occasion speaking was a contextual event; what you said at an occasion was dependent on whether the occasion was a celebration, a funeral, or a war rally. Sophistic rhetoric, with its dependence on occasion and the appropriate speech for the
occasion, is thus dependent on context. The two forms of speaking are clearly related.

**Sophistic ties to performance**

A search in the beginnings of rhetorical theory uncovers performative and cultural bonds within the genre of sophistic rhetoric. Sophistic rhetoric is, at its base, a philosophical position regarding the status of language and how it functions. Leff characterizes sophistic rhetoric through its rejection of global generalizations, grand theories, and synthetic methodologies. Sophistic gives priority to the unity of concrete experience as filtered through our interests rather than to the theoretical coherence of the varieties of experience as they are ordered according an abstract, rational calculus. Sophistic implies a pluralism in which methods of inquiry and argument are adapted to the particular subject under investigation. It seeks to solve situated problems rather than to formulate abstract theoretical principles. (23-24)

Leff indicates sophistic rhetoric takes individual experience into account and uses it to solve situated, specific problems. No universal truths are part of a sophistic agenda. Poulakos argues that “the [s]ophists were the first to infuse rhetoric with life” (36). According to Covino and Jolliffe, “the [s]ophists were famous—or infamous—for relativistic views of truth and demonstrations of
oratorical dexterity; such demonstrations were especially popular as both entertainments and as indications of the skills required of citizens in newly emerging democracies” (84). The [s]ophists exposed the *dissoi logoi* (opposite sides) of an argument; the notion of *dissoi logoi* was first found in Protagoras, an early sophist, who noted there were at least two contradictory arguments about everything. Even in defining language, argument, and their uses, the Sophists used *dissoi logoi* by contradicting each other with varied definitions of sophistic language philosophy.

Ancient Greek orators might describe sophistic skills differently than Covino and Jolliffe. Gorgias called speech a powerful drug: “For just as different drugs dispel different secretions from the body, and some bring an end to disease and others to life, so also in the case of speeches, some distress, others delight, some cause fear, others make the hearers bold, and some drug and bewitch the soul with a kind of evil persuasion” (41). Plato, who did not consider himself a sophist, attacked sophistic language use. His well-known treatise against the sophists, the *Gorgias*, did plenty to sully their reputation. Plato’s character Socrates argues that “there is no need to know the truth of the actual matters, but one merely needs to have discovered some device of persuasion which will make one appear to those who do not know to know better than those who know” (68). Bizzell and Herzberg note that “language in use creates and changes the opinions that are our only available knowledge” (39). No matter who works to change our minds, be it Plato, Isocrates, or Gorgias, we are left with our
opinions. We must enact our arguments—and performances, and problematizations—with those opinions.

The ties between the sophistic tradition and performance theory are evident if we look closely at the sophistic nature of argument and how arguments are formed. Both the sophistic tradition and performance ask rhetors to consider many sides of the argument. According to Jarratt, "A sophistic method [of arranging an argument] works by exposing and exploring a range of possibilities for knowledge and action and implicitly theorizing the process of their acceptance by the community less on the basis of logical validity and more on the force of their 'rhetorical,' i.e., persuasive and aesthetic, appeal" (28). Both the sophistic tradition and performance might rearrange the various "facts" of the situation to provide potentially new narratives of previously accepted events. Jarratt examines Gorgias' attempt to transform history with his "Encomium to Helen." According to Jarratt, one of Gorgias' goals is to cast doubt on history and disrupt the "traditional" view of what happened to begin the Trojan War. Gorgias gives credit to love (Helen's love) and its ties to force; history gives consideration only to what force accomplished, namely the fall of Troy. Jarratt notes, "consciously refusing to tell history as a continuous complete narrative leading to a pre-understood end, the sophist was able to throw into new light a range of facts and causes for the purpose of a more general consideration" (17).

When we examine arguments in performance theory for the same kind of "range of possibilities" and "rhetorical appeal," we find similar strategies.
Sophistic language philosophies ask for a consideration of several points of view in order to find the most persuasive argument. Performance also considers the varied points of view which may be extracted from a performance and what specific conclusion or argument is suggested within the artifact. Performance enacts "the complexities of human culture as seen from multiple perspectives" (Valentine and Valentine 185). The idea of multiple perspectives is a sophistic language strategy.

The "sophistic openness" Anderson demonstrates in later chapters reflects, for Jarratt, a "rejection of transcendent truths and eternal values, their ability to move a popular audience with a range of rhetorical techniques, their interest in social exigencies" (2). No language strategy or theoretical position is rejected out of hand as a non-argument. Instead, various positions are sorted through to determine which is the best argument. This ancient determination of truths is similar to our postmodern impetus to sift ideas from our fragmented cultural institutions and match our truths to the situation at hand. The philosophical position of sophistic rhetoric is old; it is reborn and recharged in performance.

Epideictic ties to performance theory

Epideictic speaking was one of the first classifications of speaking. Aristotle named it as one of the three modes of speaking in his *Rhetoric*. (48). Epideictic speaking is a specific kind of speechmaking usually involving a
specific occasion requiring a speech to an audience. Katula and Murphy note, “in addition to the courts and the assemblies, a variety of festivals and ceremonial events had evolved, each of which called for an orator to address the citizenry. One distinct type of performance was the epideixis, or public display lecture. . . . Public speaking was even an Olympic event, the winner receiving an olive wreath and being paraded through his town like a hero” (17). Epideictic speeches require an occasion for a speech, a reason to speak, and an audience to listen to the speech. Usually, the speech is to arouse praise or blame: witness Gorgias’ “Encomium to Helen”. In his speech, Gorgias attempted to turn aside the blame previously assigned to Helen and her role in the Trojan War. Rather than blame her again for her mistakes, Gorgias tries to engender sympathy for Helen and her lovestruck psyche. Gorgias actively works to change his audience’s opinion of Helen and her (mis)deeds.

Gorgias’ “Encomium” marks an intersection between sophistic rhetoric and epideictic speaking. Gorgias is working to make the worst cause (Helen’s responsibility for the Trojan war) appear better than it previously had been seen. Obviously, Helen’s love obscured her ability to think through the military implications of her relationship. Gorgias’ attempt to bring positive attention to an “underdog” point of view is distinctly sophistic. The “Encomium” is, at the same time, a public display of praise. The word “encomium” literally translates as “a speech of glowing praise.” Gorgias’ method of presentation of his view of Helen provides the crossroads between epideictic and sophistic rhetoric. If he had chosen to paint a picture of lovelorn Helen and the tragic consequences of
her love, his representation would not be an encomium. Instead, Gorgias chose a speech (a written and presumably oral text) to praise her—or at least attempt to change our minds about her. His method of delivery is epideictic; his philosophical motives are sophistic.

Timmerman claims epideictic rhetoric still affects us today: “Presidential inaugurations, religious speeches and presentations, and graduation speeches all share characteristics of the ancient category of epideictic rhetoric... rhetors engage in praise or blame and hold up particular values as laudatory and worthy... the speakers address an audience composed of spectators and not judges. And, in most cases, such speakers present discourse that is well crafted and engaging for the audience” (231). Timmerman notes epideictic speeches were performances for the benefit of an audience. Epideictic speaking is another bridge between classical rhetoric and performance rhetoric. Performance depends on several things common to epideictic rhetoric, including audience, occasion, topic, and argument. The intersecting needs, wants, and desires of these four elements make the performance (the speech) what it is—situational and keyed into the audience, occasion, topic, and argument(s) at hand.

Since sophistic rhetoric is a philosophical approach to speaking, epideictic speeches may bring that philosophical point to bear on an audience. In some ways, epideictic speech is the first form of performance to create a bridge between stage productions and purposeful speaking occasions. These public speaking occasions were specific—such as a funeral oration—but were not as formal as a play or other specifically aesthetic performance. Sheard examines the recent
epideictic speeches we see in our culture today, like acts of worship, protest, and celebration (765). These contexts provide connection for us as modern audiences. Sheard notes "as participants . . . we are reminded of the shared values and needs, interests and goals, that hold us together as members of groups or 'communities' (civic, social, religious, professional, and so on), and we see our publicly voiced words as timely and purposeful in such contexts" (765-6).

Sheard goes on to claim that today's epideictic rhetoric opens a path to alternative answers to publicly asked questions: "it can be an instrument for addressing private and public 'dis-ease,' discomfort with the status quo" (766). Sheard connects epideictic and sophistic rhetoric thanks to the emphasis of both on moment and occasion. Epideictic rhetoric "allows speaker and audience to envision possible, new, or at least different worlds" (770). Both sophistic and epideictic rhetoric also emphasize choice, and potential change. Sheard notes our epideictic discourse today "operates in contexts civic, professional or occupational, pedagogical, and so on that invite individuals to evaluate the communities or institutions to which they belong, their own roles within them, and the roles and responsibilities of their fellow constituents, including their leaders" (771). When we listen to speakers today, we are invited to make a choice/change based on the information in the speech. Each speaker (e.g., Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich) has a motive and purpose in mind for the audience, but audience members are still in control of the choices they make about whether or not to "believe" the speech. We are presented with the value judgment to make, and we make it, based on whether or not we agree with the
speaker. Relativism is nothing new. A postmodern atmosphere allows us to make judgments based on our personal value systems. Larger values are held by larger numbers of people, and some values may exist on a cultural level, but we still think and act according to our individual judgments.

Sheard argues:

Like its ancient counterpart, contemporary epideictic rhetoric is ultimately about conduct and values within communities addressed or invoked. It occurs in assemblies large and small, formal and informal, public and private. Its efficacy depends today as much as it did in antiquity on kairos or “exigency” in the broadest sense (not just the “occasion” of discourse, but what makes the occasion what it is)—the critical convergence of time, place, and circumstance, including audience needs, desires, expectations, attitudes, resources, and so on. (771).

Sheard’s argument is significant. If epideictic speaking is ultimately about values, it is ultimately about the choices we make in our lives about what to believe. And, as she notes, value choice can occur in many situations, large and small, public and private. These choices ask us to evaluate the values espoused around us. Our value decisions can then be made in agreement, in opposition, or in a combination of dis/agreement with what values are brought forth in epideictic occasions. Epideictic discourse is socially tied to argument. Socially acceptable arguments make a difference to the success or failure of an epideictic speech.
Individual and community within epideictic and sophistic rhetoric

Sheard's description of current epideictic rhetoric brings forth elements of individual and community within the epideictic situations. A full treatment of the importance of individual/community interaction with performance situations isn't possible here; the topic is too extensive. However, I need to touch on the individual/community concerns raised by epideictic and sophistic rhetoric, at least briefly, so that ideas of individual and communities as social influences are incorporated within these aspects of the rhetorical tradition.

Community values are important to rhetorical analysis. Whenever we examine an artifact, we must consider the community, philosophical tradition, or discourse community out of which the artifact emerges. In classical rhetoric, speechmaking was used to further the public good. Public speaking was used to enlighten the polis on some topic. Miller argues, "the polis is always the arena where discourse takes place, the source of issues, arguments, audiences, conventions—and the prize that is ultimately at stake" (81). An argument is made to an audience (a polis) in order to influence values and beliefs held by that audience. The interplay between individual and community is not only necessary, but essential for shaping social thought. At the same time, individual beliefs do not spring up in a vacuum. The community helps individuals determine whether they will work for or against generally held community beliefs. Performance studies is one tool we can use to understand these
interactions between individuals and communities to see how belief systems are promoted or deflected.

Consigny makes a similar argument in his comparison of Gorgias and current performance artists. Consigny examines how Gorgias influences the polis by asking them to question their currently held beliefs. According to Consigny, “Gorgias seeks to expose the deceptive nature of those truths [the dominant logos of the community], in effect unraveling the fabric of the dominant logos in which the ‘truths’ were woven” (113). Gorgias induces a “‘crisis of reason’ for his audience, exposing the inherent limits and inadequacy of their privileged logos, and requiring them to confront the immediate crisis in a new way” (113).

Gorgias’ epideictic speeches took up subjects like Helen of Troy’s betrayal and provided another side to the argument, thus providing the “crisis” for his audience. In response, his audience had to decide how they would approach Gorgias’ position. Consigny’s exploration of Gorgias as a performance artist points out the interplay between community and individual. Consigny notes, “the performance artist, like Gorgias, places his audience—and himself—in a situation that challenges conventional means of perceiving, thinking, and behaving” (114). A rhetor in a performance situation challenges herself and her audience. A reality created by the performance influences the audience. The audience is affected by the reality as it is carried out by individuals within the community. A “crisis of meaning” brought about by a performance is, again, another example of attempting to understand social connections. The crisis is
induced by the contradiction between belief systems. The contradiction works to examine both belief systems by exposing ways in which they are/not similar.

Zarefsky notes in an address to a national convention, "the common focus on the same story is a bond of community; the contest among alternative readings promotes diversity. Although it may seem logically inconsistent, it is rhetorically feasible to have it both ways" (7). Zarefsky's idea speaks to the possibility of holding the individual and the community together in one's set of stories. The common good for the individual and the community can be promoted at the same time. Performance is potentially able to accomplish this task by giving an individual the chance to provide her beliefs to the community (her audience). As sophistic and epideictic rhetoric are shaped by the speaker, the audience, and the kairos of the situation, a performance is shaped by similar forces. Individual and community can be considered separately, but considered together they provide a more complete picture of the performance at hand.

Performances allow communal stories and individual interpretation to act on us at the same time. Our performance results from these influences. The interpreter is a member of communit(ies) that believe in particular interpretations of texts and contexts. Interpretations will influence the understanding of the performance at hand. Interpretations may, however, be modified by the individual's perspective. He may not believe in the same explanation of a text/context as his community does. He may interpret the performance based on his beliefs instead of the community's beliefs.
The relative confusion of trying to describe a spiral of interpretation indicates the embeddedness of the individual within the community. Texts, created by individuals or communities, and contexts, created by the same, are individually and communally interpreted. But neither set—text/context or individual/community—is complete without both halves of the whole.

Relating to argument/relating to performance

Noting performance's history within the rhetorical tradition is useful for one particular reason: establishing performance theory has a relation to theories of argument. Individual and communal rhetoric influence both ancient and contemporary performance. In my next section I take up another tie to the rhetorical tradition: narrative rhetoric. In general, narrative, epideictic, and sophistic rhetoric all share the characteristic of providing arguments, which are tailored for the occasion and for the audience at hand. Narratives comprise the texts of the arguments.

Narrative theory and its ties to performance

Narratives provide another link between individuals and communities. According to Jerome Bruner, narrative is the only way we have to describe our lived experience (“Life as Narrative” 12). Bruner argues that humans hold “a predisposition to organize experience into a narrative form, into plot structures
and the rest" (Acts 45). Storytelling and the use of narrative is a tradition among all cultures. Oral stories existed long before the beginning of recorded history. Narrative theory deserves attention in the context of performance for several reasons, including how narrative links performance and the classical rhetorical tradition; how narratives connect people to each other; and how narratives describe sites of cultural struggle.

**Narrative rhetoric and the rhetorical tradition**

Within the classical period of rhetoric, the Roman rhetors Cicero and Quintilian use narrative as part of their rhetorical schematics. In Book II of Cicero's *De Oratore*, Cicero offers a narrative example to illustrate eloquence and demonstrate how a speaker may reach his audience through narrative:

> ... if brevity means employing only the absolutely essential minimum of words, this is required occasionally, but often it is actually very detrimental in stating the facts of the case, not only because it causes obscurity but also because it does away with a quality that is the greatest merit in narrative, that of entertaining and convincing. (II.Ixxx.326)

Narrative, as Cicero indicates, can offer audiences particular details of shared human experience and draw individuals closer together. The *narratio*, at the beginning of a lawyer's case, can make or break the argument: "for it touches the main issue of the whole suit whether the case has been set out with
circumspection or the opposite, because the narrative is the fountain head from which the whole remainder of the speech flows” (II.Ixxi.330). If the audience cannot identify with the narratio, the lawyer cannot reach the audience and the case is lost. In the same way, Quintilian encouraged rhetoric students to pursue and articulate the common occasions of human experience, because common sites “are of the very nature of speeches on trials, and, if you add the name of an accused party, are real accusations” (IV.22). Quintilian indicates that the particularizing details of a given case make the case more understandable, since the audience can come together and identify with a shared experience or cultural phenomenon."

Cicero and Quintilian are asking students to prepare for the courtroom or legal arena, but their arguments for the power of narrative apply as well. Performances argue, and they usually argue in narrative ways. As Cicero and Quintilian advocate, narrative is a crucial tool to help the audience understand the arguer’s point of view. According to Frantz, narratives provide three different argumentative roles for communication: 1) a way of knowing about the context of any rhetorical situation, 2) a way of connecting socially with our audience, and 3) a way of structuring an argument (2, emphasis in original). A narrative way of knowing helps both the rhetor and her audience understand the context of the situation and the context of the argument. A narrative way of connecting rhetor to audience is partially encompassed by a way of knowing and partially enveloped by the kairos of the situation. A narrative structure for argument presumes narratives are different forms of argument. Narratives
provide plots connected with other storylines augmented by important details to make their arguments instead of direct claims, proofs, and evidence. Narratives provide the multiple perspective advocated by the sophists.

Thinking of narrative structures as arguments leads us into examining current narrative scholarship. Many more theorists, especially psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists, now recognize the story—its basic structure and basic power—as one of the building blocks of how we construct our lives. Carlton suggests that including personal events in our scholarship points out “[personal events and stories] have everything to do with our intellectual histories, if by intellectual we mean our attempts to discern significance in the social text” (339, emphasis in original). Using Carlton’s definition of intellectual opens up an entirely new way to think of narratives and stories of personal events.

Contemporary narrative theory

Current narrative theory provides updated viewpoints of ancient rhetorical visions of narrative. Narrative theory plays a role in disciplines as wide-ranging as anthropology and organizational communication. Mumby provides this definition of narrative: “narrative is both a communication phenomenon that is worthy of intellectual scrutiny and (epistemologically speaking) it represents a particular orientation toward the study of social phenomena” (3). Mumby’s two-part definition of narrative is important. The
definition encompasses how narratives are formed and how narratives affect our view of the world. Mumby argues:

- narrative is examined not as a fixed and stable communication phenomenon but rather as part of the complex and shifting terrain of meaning that makes up the social world. . . . [a] willingness to recognize the open-ended nature of knowledge claims; to recognize the difficulty (impossibility?) of making any universal claims about the human condition; and to acknowledge the extent to which, as theorists and researchers, we are never neutral, dispassionate observers of behavior but are always heavily implicated in the construction of the narratives . . . that provide insight to the social reality that we inhabit. (3-4)

A fundamental belief in the "open-ended nature of knowledge claims," means narrative exploration provide a way to explore knowledge claims within a naturally fluid form.

Contemporary narrative theory appears many different places in the academy. Narrative allows many individuals to connect in many different contexts. Narrative plays a role in pedagogy, though the place of narrative can be controversial. Kail claims that "textbooks provide us with many . . . culturally essential narratives of knowledge" (179), while DiPardo argues, "among composition teachers 'narrative' and personal experience essays are generally regarded as the same, largely suspect phenomenon" (61). Edward Bruner argues that, for ethnographers, "the narrative structures we construct are not secondary
narratives about data but primary narratives that establish what is to count as data. New narratives yield new vocabulary, syntax, and meaning in our ethnographic accounts, they define what constitute the data of those accounts” (142-43). Narratives in anthropology have long been considered rich sources of information about culture. Narrative has recently been used in analyzing interactions in the business and technical worlds. Blyler reminds us, “theorizing about narrative has been linked to another vital issue: a reexamination of research methodologies” (1). Narratives represent another method of studying human interaction, a method that may not be as “exact” as some scholars desire. But narratives bring other kinds of data to the fore that quantitative information simply cannot deliver. Narratives tell us how someone feels about the three children they’ve lost to disease, not just the fact that high infant mortality is a problem for them. Feelings and facts do different things. Narratives work well for studying the ins and outs of human emotion and its related behavior.

One component of narrative research is the “doubling” of narratives. Scholars who write about narratives write their own narrative about the stories and cultures they study. In narrative research, this double-story must remain in the fore. In analyzing stories others tell, we tell a story about what we think about those other stories. We must consider what our narratives of research say about the narratives we use as data. In narrative scholarship, we also encounter (thanks to this double-story) an intensified interrogation of the legitimacy of data. We must accurately record the stories we hear from others. We must accurately represent these stories in the narratives we tell of our research. Scholars must
keep in mind these “double narratives” and remain aware of the pluses and pitfalls engendered in narrative research. Scholars probe different angles of narrative studies within academe: narratives are cultural, narratives are essential, narratives make data, narratives are suspect. Academe has room for all of these perspectives on narrative theory.

Fisher’s definition of humans as *homo narrans* completes the circle of meaning around narrative use in social settings. Fisher uses a “narrative human” metaphor to explain our “essential nature”; the metaphor works better than any other metaphor communication scholars have already tried (62). Fisher argues we should take narration as the most basic human way to explain ourselves: “when narration is taken as the master metaphor, it subsumes the others. The other metaphors become conceptions that inform various ways of recounting or accounting for human choice and action” (62, italics in original). Recounting is how we learn to understand our experiences and others’ experiences. Fisher continues his description of how we use narrative in our lives:

Regardless of the form they are given, *recounting* and
*accounting for* constitute stories we tell ourselves and each other to establish a meaningful life-world. The character of narrator(s), the conflicts, the resolutions, and the styles will vary, but each mode of recounting and accounting for is but a way of relating a “truth” about the human condition.
The *Homo narrans* metaphor is thus an incorporation and extension of Burke's definition of 'man' as the 'symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animals.' The idea of human being as storytellers posits the generic form of all symbol composition. It holds that symbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them in order to establish ways of living in common, in intellectual and spiritual communities in which there is confirmation for the story that constitutes one's life. (62–63)

Fisher approaches narrative as the way humans *choose* to communicate their experience to others; we choose this mode of communication because it confirms we are human. We have varied reasons for contributing narratives to the larger social conversation: a narrative may illuminate a point, provide an example, amplify a point of larger discussion, or provide a spirit of *esprit de corps* and contribute to a feeling of goodwill. Rosaldo notes humans use narrative for this reason of goodwill, but with a specific purpose in mind: according to Rosaldo, stories often *shape*, rather than simply reflect, human conduct (129, my italics). Narratives carry directions for living.
Contextual issues of narrative research

Chapter Two is designed to provide connections between performance, narrative and visuals. I argue narratives are one way to identify the texts of a particular performance. Peterson and Langellier discuss the involvement of text and context in narrative research methods in their recent article “The Politics of Personal Narrative Methodology.” Peterson and Langellier agree that, if narratives are to be taken seriously as research artifacts, we must acknowledge the contested, political nature of the texts and contexts involved in the narratives. Personal experience is not an unproblematic source, origin or explanation of knowledge. Rather, our personal experience and identity are full of power relationships shaping our resultant narratives. The complex set of “cultural effects and relations of power” (137) are central to narrative theory. For Peterson and Langellier, three assumptions have to be challenged in order to more clearly expose power and context in narratives: 1) personal narrative is a text; 2) we are fully able to transcribe and analyze personal narratives; and 3) personal narratives do not constitute a performance (137).

The researchers argue, instead, narratives are sets of relationships and strategies rather than texts: “personal narrative is not ‘given’ as a text; rather, personal narrative is a strategic practice of textualizing and contextualizing performance” (141). Narratives are strategic practices, and thus transcription is equally strategic. The transcriptionist chooses the “important” pieces of narratives and may leave the rest, thus forcing a form on a narrative which may not be accurate. At the same time, the transcriptionist cannot capture all the
nuances of the narrative performance. As Peterson and Langellier argue, "if we had better technology . . . we would finally know just what was happening in a personal narrative" (142). Better technology could capture more accurately the grunts, hand gestures, and physical settings that are part of personal narratives.

Peterson and Langellier’s last challenge is to see personal narratives as performances rather than stand-alone texts to be interpreted as we interpret literature. They argue “narrative production interrogates the production of identity and the experience; it negotiates and construes relations of power that implicate the research context as well as the story-text” (146). Narrative performance represents the “multiple contingencies of cultural conflict,” (146) including whose narrative this is, what the relationship is between the narrator and the information related, whose pleasure or pain resides in the narrative, and whose identity is embodied within the story. Peterson and Langellier contend we cannot “stop constructing” our multiple subjective connections. We are always within ourselves and our relationship to others. We are always performing ourselves in our narratives.

Peterson and Langellier are right to call for a more thorough discussion of the text and context of narratives in performance. Narratives as shifting, contextual entities means narratives are part of a larger performance. Peterson and Langellier see narratives as an interrogation of our texts and contexts rather than a static entity that can be transcribed and stored. My project accomplishes a similar task. I apply narrative as a central textual feature in performance, and
thus expose narrative’s ability to question and complicate our performances of identity.

Since stories communicate truths between humans and we can use stories to conduct and promote specific kinds of action—including arguments—narratives should be considered carefully in our attempts to make sense of how culture is created and transformed through performance. DiPardo argues, "Few would dispute that the best thinking and writing is at once personal and public, both infused with private meaning and focused upon the world beyond the self" (60). Narrative theory provide ample evidence to suggest narrative as a fruitful form of communication worthy of scholarly attention.

Narratives are part of the communicative building blocks of culture. In his book Acts of Meaning, Bruner posits that a narrative “can . . . teach, conserve memory, or alter the past” (52). I choose to incorporate narrative into performance for the functions Bruner notes—its power of teaching, its preservation of memory, and a means to alter the past—but I include narrative’s power to shape the future. We influence the future with the narratives we tell today. Part of our narrative impact includes the “verisimilitude” of stories that Bruner argues for in Actual Minds, Possible Worlds (11). Narratives may provide the nearest notion of “truth” portrayed in human interaction. Narratives can be powerful forces. Performance scholars Stern and Henderson sum up the power of narratives in this way:

Constituted in a communal process, [narratives] tell about personal, lived experience in a way that assists in the construction of identity,
reinforces or challenges private and public belief systems and values, and either resists or reinforces the dominant cultural practices of the community event occurs. The personal narrative very often gives the teller as well as the hearer a sense of value, cohesion, and empowerment. (35)

According to Maclean, “the energy involved in performance, the energies unleashed by performance can perhaps best be appreciated at the most fundamental level in oral narrative” (2, italics in original). Maclean goes on to say that “the transgressive power of the performance cracks the rigid framework of ideologies and preconceptions to allow a release of energy which can then be channeled . . . in renewed creativity . . .” (2-3).

Visuals also play an important role in performances. In the last section of this chapter, I examine visual theory in light of its rhetorical connections, its social connections, including art, and its links to performance.

**Visuals in a rhetorical framework**

Visuals give us a chance to enhance other forms of rhetoric with another kind of text. Visuals emphasize our points, make clear our meanings, and, in some cases, offer contradictory viewpoints to the ones emerging from our stories. Visuals—whether they are pictures, clothes we wear, or room arrangements—
are another version of our arguments, our rhetorical abilities, and our
textual/contextual knowledge that influences our communication.

In this section I address four primary functions of visuals. A visual can be
_primarily_ informative, aesthetic, persuasive, or ideological. I emphasize
"primarily" because all four functions exist in almost any visual. But a visual
almost always has a primary function corresponding to one of these four
categories. The words on this page are representations of a code we know to read
as "English," which makes them first a visual expression before they form a
linguistic expression. Before we read the words, we must "read" the letters as
visual symbols which make up larger visual symbols. In the same way, Gretchen
Barbatsis describes televised campaign ads as "pictorial texts" because they are
"characterized by both their content and compositional [syntactic] qualities" (70).
Visuals can be read in the same way we read other symbolic, syntactic systems.

**Informative visuals**

At first glance, a street sign and a painting have few visual qualities in
common. A street sign is easily recognizable as an informative visual. Even
without words, an eight-sided red sign tells us something in our culture—when
we see it, we stop. Even though a painting seems less informative, it does serve
to document the history of its period, either through what's painted on the
canvas or through its style. In general, all visual texts have an informational
component.
Edward Tufte is recognized worldwide as an expert on informational visuals. His standards for informational visuals are high. Tufte’s criteria for a successful informative visual include data accuracy, statistical honesty, proportional pictures, and enough context to understand the visual. His main expertise lies in analyzing visual displays of quantitative information. According to Tufte, “of all methods for analyzing and communicating statistical information, well-designed data graphics are usually the simplest and at the same time the most powerful” (9). Data graphics may be the most significant examples of informational visuals. A chart or a bar graph can be worth thousands of words. Tufte argues “Excellence in statistical graphics consists of complex ideas communicated with clarity, precision, and efficiency” (13). Clarity, precision, and efficiency can be useful in creating any kind of visual text. If we follow Tufte’s principles in designing visuals, we can be assured our idea will emerge from our head and be displayed in a way that represents what we want to say. What an interpreter takes from our visual is anyone’s guess. However, if we pay close attention to Tufte’s requirements, we will construct our visuals to reflect our viewpoints.

At first blush, informational visuals seem to be everywhere. Each visual we see conveys some sort of information. However, Tufte’s quest for precision in data displays indicates a particular standard for accurate informational visuals. Those visual signs and symbols we rely on consistently for information have particular requirements. Informational signs on interstates and highways are green or brown. STOP signs are red octagons. Though we can adapt if we change
the visual standard (we could learn to stop at a green square STOP sign), we rely most clearly on the visual symbol to convey the information. Even if a red octagonal sign didn’t have the word STOP on it, we would likely stop our car in front of it. All visuals contain information, but for some, information is the primary feature of the visual.

Aesthetic visuals

Primarily aesthetic visuals include paintings, sculptures, drawings—almost any kind of art is considered aesthetic. Sets for theatre productions, furniture, and architecture are other examples of visual structures that might be considered aesthetically important before their informational, persuasive, or ideological components are exposed. Whatever the form, the relationship of art and culture is important to explore here.

_ art as visual communication _ Art operates as a system of visual communication. The statement sounds obvious. The perceived beauty of art is part of its communicative value, but the meaning of a piece is more than aesthetic qualities such as color, shape, and texture. Art is a complex blend of appearance and content. The content of Laurie Anderson’s art is part of what I analyze in Chapter Four. However, the visual appearance of art is of primary importance for many art scholars and appreciators. For some patrons, appearance provides enough meaning. The aesthetic stance requires patrons to
examine a piece from an appropriately reverent distance, commenting only on its beauty. Many art critics believe disregarding this distant "aesthetic attitude" is a dangerous prospect. Stolnitz argues the definition of the "aesthetic attitude" is the "disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone" (10). Stolnitz's viewpoint lets us "contemplate objects" and look at them as individual, stand-alone pieces of beauty. Who decides the standards of beauty is partially represented by who can maintain the distant, aesthetic attitude. Inglis posits art as an indicator of power relationships in cultures—those who say what art is "good" or "beautiful" are those who hold the power of a society (183). Aesthetics again becomes central to art's worth. According to Inglis, visual communication in the guise of art is another way of maintaining the status quo.

We can conceptualize aesthetics as a cultural construct if we consider its context. We look at art because it is beautiful, ugly, or unusual. But often we must go deeper than how art looks to discover its social importance. Content needs to be discussed as part of the visual communication art provides. Alpers notes, "art is a social phenomenon... artists are members of society" (231). Because they are part of society, artists are affected by societal forces. The art they make reflects their opinions of institutions, trends, and values. Alpers argues, "the pictorial arts both present and characterize social conditions and beliefs" (231). The characterization of social attitudes is how art communicates. Following the traditional dictates of the aesthetic attitude does little to help understand visuals in culture. A disinterested viewpoint will not
lead us to understanding the social implications of art. Instead, we must think of art and its beauty as connected to the larger social systems around it.

Aesthetics is the point at which context enters visual communication. According to Charles Kostelnick, “aesthetics speaks to cultural issues because it contextualizes design, situating it in a given moment” (188). The “given moment” of the piece is critical. If we consider a piece as a stand-alone example of an artist’s talent, we miss the social conditions surrounding the work. Was the artist poor or wealthy? Was the piece commissioned by a patron? Was the artist popular? All of these cultural conditions (power relations, political connections, social aspirations) influence what an artist says with his pieces. The expression of these conditions in the piece and in our discussions of it help us understand the cultural forces influencing the work. We deconstruct a visual, including art, by understanding the cultural relationships within the visual.

Hatcher considers the contexts and functions of art as central to art’s societal importance. Hatcher argues that art “helps hold society together because it reflects and reinforces the relationships deemed proper in that society; art symbols are collective representations which by their form and constant presence are shaped by and help shape the social order” (113). We make art to make visual communication of our ideas. Artists propose new works, combine old ideas to make new ones, and react against previous art in order to express the cultural, political, and social connections creating society’s institutions. Creating connections, which then may lead to social institutions, helps individuals generate power for themselves or their causes.
Hatcher asserts that art can help recapture power for individuals. In her view, art "helps hold society together because of its psychological functions—essentially it acts as a safety valve, channeling discontent, disruption, and excess energy" (113). Art is how people visually express themselves, especially when they do not agree with a publicly held opinion. Instead of hosting a public debate, trying to earn a spot on Jay Leno, or writing a book, an artist might make a sculpture reflecting his oppositional point of view. When disagreement is required, art is another way of allowing for dissent.

Art is, essentially, an organizing process. Art helps us discover how things are related to each other, both visually and socially. Hatcher notes, “visual communication differs from verbal communication, not in being more a matter of feeling, or of the unconscious, but in being more a matter of how things are related to each other . . .” (138). For example, art points out the relationship between the artist and her viewpoint on various social situations. The Des Moines Art Center in Des Moines, Iowa, has three rhinestone-encrusted vacuum cleaners encased in Lucite boxes. The vacuums are in an art space—a museum—where beauty is expected, and they are dressed in “jewels,” which adds to their aesthetic value. However, the vacuums say something to us about our culture which is deeper than the aesthetic pleasures of rhinestone-studded vacuums. The artist could be indicating cleanliness is a very overrated value, something we think is “precious” enough to belong to a museum. The artist may be trying to argue that anything holds aesthetic value (a Dada point of view), including a vacuum cleaner, especially a vacuum with rhinestones. We have no way to
determine the artist’s intentions; we have no way of knowing how or why the Art Center decided to purchase these particular pieces. What we do know is that these dressed-up vacuums provide us with more than their aesthetic value. They provide us with a visual representation of someone’s opinion about vacuuming—it is up to us to determine that opinion, but the visual representations of the vacuums ask us to consider what vacuuming might mean to us and to others.

Aesthetic elements are central to visuals. We look at objects because they catch our eye, in some way, and they catch our eye with their appearance. If the piece is well designed, its visual effect is usually persuasive.

**Persuasive and ideological visuals**

It is hard to separate persuasion from ideology. In general, the persuasive nature of a visual communication stems from an ideology which asked for the creation of the visual. I consider both persuasion and ideology under one heading because of their close ties. Of course, persuasion and ideology are two features of visuals which deny easy separation from other categories used here. Persuasion and ideology exist within information, and aesthetic choices can be determined by persuasive or ideological preferences. If we disentangle persuasion from ideology through using persuasion as a particular feature of argument, we can make a small separation between the two.
The persuasive/argumentative features of visuals emerge in different places. According to Kostelnick, "postmodernists like Charles Jencks (1984) have viewed architectural designs as a vehicle for communication, Geoffrey Broadbent (1980) has explored the semiotics of buildings, and Richard Buchanan (1985) has examined product design as a form of rhetoric" (189). Visual symbol systems are rhetorical and part of the tradition of argument. Not everyone agrees that visuals actually "argue": some rhetoricians claim that only oral and written symbol systems can argue. Fleming claims, "argument is reasoning towards a debatable conclusion" (19), and since a visual cannot be broken into claim and support, it cannot qualify as a true argument. According to Fleming, "a picture can be considered an 'argument' only by stretching the meaning of that word beyond recognition" (19). However, experts like Kostelnick and Foss would claim that many different kinds of visual systems can "argue," and in the same way traditional arguments are formed. Visual symbol systems employ argument and ideology with regularity. Foss calls for a more thorough study of visual argument because, "by situating visual imagery at the periphery of communication theories, we have overlooked much information about communicative processes, practices, and principles" (85). Visuals respond to the cultural context surrounding them and their creator as much as any other meaning-making symbol system.

Visuals are, of course, ideological. Robin Kinross claims that no visual, no matter how neutral it seems, can ever be free of persuasive/rhetorical influences.
Kinross invokes Gui Bonsiepe, an influential visual designer from the sixties, to enhance the argument that visuals cannot be free of rhetoric:

"Information without rhetoric is a pipe-dream which ends up in the break-down of communication and total silence. "Pure" information exists for the designer only in arid abstraction. As soon as he begins to give it concrete shape, to bring it within the range of experience, the process of rhetorical infiltration begins. (Bonsiepe 30)

Bonsiepe takes traditional rhetorical figures, such as metonymy and metaphor, and gives them visual counterparts through his analysis of advertising. Kinross picks up Bonsiepe’s cue and examines rhetorical figures in other visuals, including a railroad timetable. Kinross concludes, "nothing is free of rhetoric, that visual manifestations emerge from particular historical circumstances, that ideological vacuums do not exist" (29). Kinross' claim alerts us that anything from a train schedule to a dress is value-laden, persuasive, and potent.

We see with(in) our ideology. Our belief systems help dictate the visual cues we interpret in our environment. Mieke Bal mentions visual ideology as a part of seeing. We assume that the things we see are "true" or "real." According to Bal, "what you see must be real, true, present, or otherwise reliable. After all, it is visible, you see it there, before you. Although every visitor [to a museum] knows at an intuitive level that an exposition is a representation, the presence of the object provides an undeniable urge to recognize its 'truth'" (5). Discussing visual "truth" takes visuals even farther than persuasion. Visuals contain our
belief systems as well as our arguments. Our ideology enters into the visuals we create because our epistemology cannot be divorced from visual communication any more than it can be from other written or oral communication.

Barton and Barton have done significant work with combinations of ideology and visual communication. In their article "Ideology and the Map," they attempt to uncover how "visual signification serves to sustain relations of domination" (50), ones that might not be readily apparent. Barton and Barton argue that maps are one of the most "quintessentially ideological" visual systems (51). A map's ideology cannot be detached from the map. Consequently, the map becomes a representation of the ideologies promoted by the mapmaker. If the mapmaker is American, America may well be the center of his map. The Bartons' goal is to "deconstruct the innocence of such maps" (52) in order to uncover those ideological structures embedded within the visual.

Ideology is the driving force behind the exertion of power. Barton and Barton have studied ideology in other visuals besides maps. They claim that "visual as site of power inscription" ("Modes" 138, italics in original) is a significant notion for document designers. Invoking Foucault and following the idea of Bentham's Panopticon, a sophisticated penitentiary that allowed guards to view all inmates at once, Barton and Barton elaborate on synoptic and analytic vision (139-141). Looking with a synoptic view allows us to understand a great deal of information at once. Synoptic modes of power in visuals include maps, once again. Barton and Barton argue, "in a map, after all, the whole world can be brought within the purview of a single viewer" (143). Maps allow us to see
many relationships at once: place, area, population density. Synoptic visuals allow us to look at information and take it in. Employing an analytic mode of power in our visuals means we are able to view particulars. Tables, charts, and graphs are analytic visuals, and we must see them carefully in order to make sense of them (144-45). These modes of power in visuals can operate together—in the form of a bus map, for instance, that demonstrates routes and pick-up times in the same space—to generate even more ideological power for visuals. Barton and Barton’s most important argument is the notion that visuals can represent ideologies. Power, taken as resistance (“Modes” 157), allows us to fight against existing power structures. As a result, we can instill our ideology into any visual we create. We can also assess visuals according to the power they demonstrate.

**Relating to visuals/relating to performance**

To some degree, all visuals are informational, aesthetic, persuasive, and ideological. Some visuals have more of one characteristic than another. Our job is to decide how much of each feature is present in a visual and how we will react to the visual’s message.

Art, document design, advertising, architecture, and nonverbal communication are all part of visual communication. All of these visual texts can be combined with other texts to either enhance or detract from the message intended by the visual. The combination can be more powerful than a singular
text. Rutter's study concerns gazes between individuals in conversation, and the final point he makes in his book is important to how we understand the role of visuals in general: "Language and nonverbal communication do more than work in parallel—they are integrated together—and we must not forget" (214). We cannot remove the impact of a visual from our "complete" communication (words, documents, nonverbals, body language, whatever may be involved). We do not know how others will interpret our visual, or our message in general. We cannot control their reception or interpretation. All we are able to do is create our communication texts, whatever they may be, and place them in public view for others to consider.

An examination of visual theory demonstrates visuals may be read as informational, aesthetic, persuasive, or ideological texts. Our visual texts then become a part of our performances as bar graphs, costumes, advertisements, or manifestos. Belief systems and visual representations dictate how we incorporate visuals in our interaction and how we use them as persuasive elements in the performance of our stories. Individuals and communities are affected by our visual arguments. Gablik invokes the notion of community to describe how art can have a positive visual impact:

In the past, we have made much of the idea of art as a mirror (reflecting the times); we have had art as a hammer (social protest); and we have had art as furniture (something to hang on the walls); and we have had art as a search for the self. There is another kind
of art, which speaks to the power of connectedness and establishes bonds, art that calls us into relationship. (114)

Art and other means of visual communication can draw us together to help us explore our social condition. The visual text of our performances provide a significant piece of our performances.

A chapter summary

In this chapter I forge bonds between performance studies, the rhetorical tradition, and narrative theory, both past and present. I have included visual theory as a part of performance studies to point out the importance of visual rhetoric and how it contributes to cultural analysis. I believe the ties between performance and argument are evidenced through exploring specific kinds of texts used in performance, namely narratives and visuals. Performances are powerful, intentional communication forms. Performance theory draws its argumentative strength from previous rhetorical traditions such as sophistic rhetoric and epideictic rhetoric. Performances gains importance through its social aspects, detailed by sociologists, anthropologists, and performance theorists. We perform arguments with other members of culture, under the cultural influences brought to bear on us through the contexts of the narratives and visuals.
The performances we encounter may be fleeting, extended, scripted, or completely extemporaneous. They may be specifically aesthetic, spartan, technologically up-to-date, or without formal trappings of elegance. No matter how they are done, our performances express our point of view (our argument) on the topic at hand as we see it through our acculturated eyes. Performance is made through a combination of text and context, in this case narrative and visual texts and their surrounding contexts. Others will interpret our performances, and we do the same. We perform in response to the social situations we encounter. Performances help us negotiate the culture around us.

Chapter Three addresses the cultural negotiation our performances create by more carefully examining the idea of context. Contextualizing the narrative and visual texts within a performance can be construed as the problematization of cultural connections. Problematization is a term for interpretation envisioned by Michel Foucault in his later works. Chapter Three explores Foucault's theories of language, culture, and power to help make sense of this contextualizing process. Chapter Three considers how language shapes culture and power, and how power structures created by language can be exposed.

The aim of a performance is to ask, ultimately, what an artifact argues for in terms of cultural representation. Chapter Three explores how performative arguments are shaped through our language rules and power structures, and how cultural contexts created through problematization are part of the performance. Diamond reminds us, “performance, as one crucial practice in the making of culture, is inseparable from politics and history” (10). I have covered
some of the texts of performance theory's politics and history in this chapter. In Chapter Three, I investigate the contextual sides of politics and history.
CHAPTER THREE:
MICHEL FOUCAULT AND THE CONTEXTS
OF PROBLEMATIZATION

Viewing performance within a complex matrix of power, serving
diverse cultural desires, encourages a permeable understanding of
history and change. (Diamond 2)

Encouraging a “permeable understanding of history and change” is the
juncture at which Foucault enters this study. Foucault’s idea of problematization
provides a way to contextualize performance. For that reason, I choose to devote
Chapter Three to the examination of problematization and how it can help us
understand the contexts of texts and performances.

Foucault’s work was not done in the discipline of communication studies,
but he provokes much thought among those who study language use. Cooper
argues Foucault’s primary object of study was “discursive practice,” and the
centrality of discourse in his work accounts for his popularity among
rhetoricians (272-3). Cooper notes, “his analyses of systems of thought, power,
and ethics provide commentary about both repressive powers and forces for
liberation within contemporary society” (273). Foss, Foss, and Trapp argue,
“despite the wide variety of subject areas with which his work dealt, some
essentially rhetorical concepts served as the foundation for much of his work . . .
[including] the relationship between rhetoric and knowledge . . . the notion of
power . . . [and] an analysis of ethics and the means by which individuals constitute themselves as subjects . . .” (216).

In this chapter I relate Foucault to the field of rhetoric while exploring basic concepts important to his characterizations of power and language. Exploring Foucault’s writings on language is a way of approaching text. Foucault’s definitions of discourse and language seem to offer “meta-text” about what text can do. I then offer Foucault’s writings on problematization, as a way to shape and focus the context of a particular text. An understanding of problematization provides a basis in Chapter Four for an analysis of Anderson’s performances.

Relating Foucault to rhetoric

The connections between Foucault and rhetoric are not immediately visible. Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was a French philosopher, historian, and language scholar. His formal education was in philosophy, psychology, and psychiatry. Some of his major works include A History of Madness, a study of how society contributes to the construction of “insanity”; Discipline and Punish, a history of prisons and confinement; and The History of Sexuality, a history of the relationship between sex and culture. He has been called by many scholars a “post-structural” language philosopher. In post-structural thought, the interaction between reader and text is productive and active, not static and fixed.
Reading is no longer an exercise in "passive consumption" (Sarup 4). Instead, the reader and text create meaning together.

Though the titles of Foucault's major works do not suggest rhetorical studies, Foucault's subject matter involved such rhetorical concepts as discursive practices (how our speaking patterns are influenced), the articulation (connection) between language and its subject matter, and the relationships between knowledge construction and cultural institutions (216). Foss, Foss, and Trapp argue Foucault's contributions to rhetoric might appear limited if we examine the disciplines in which his works are based (209). However, the "metadiscourse" of his works relates him to rhetoric. Sarup characterizes Foucault as "one of the leading post-structuralists" of this century. Alongside other significant theorists such as Lacan and Derrida, Foucault "question[s] the possibility of the objectivity of any language of description or analysis" (Sarup 4).

Not only is Foucault's work included in current rhetorical thought, it echoes classical concepts. Foucault has been "adopted" by rhetoricians due to his study of the effects of language and power. His work has been incorporated into both contemporary and classical rhetorical studies. Foucault has been invoked as a modern practitioner of classical rhetorical concepts. Covino and Jolliffe note how Nietzsche, Derrida, and Foucault have all worked with predominantly sophistic ideals in their language studies, namely the inability of language to transmit reality and "truth" as rhetorical construction (67-8).

Bizzell and Herzberg argue that Foucault "treats author, meaning, and knowledge itself as a function of discourse, not as its source" (1126). Foucault
challenges the idea that knowledge provokes discourse. Instead, discourse
generates its own reality, and knowledge emerges from within the discourse.
Bizzell and Herzberg assert Foucault's idea of discourse "describes the
relationship between language and knowledge; the functions of disciplines,
institutions, and other discourse communities; the ways that particular
statements come to have truth value, the effects of discursive practices on social
action; and the uses of discourse to exercise power" (1127). They note Foucault
does not use the term *rhetoric* in his works; he prefers to use *discourse* as his
umbrella term for communication. However, they argue "there is no question
that his theory addressed a number of ideas that are central to modern rhetoric,"
including the notions that "rhetoric is epistemic, discourse (rhetoric) is a form of
social action, and that power is disseminated in society through our laws,
regulations, and texts" (1128).

**Foucault and communication scholars**

Foucault's work has been useful to two sets of communication scholars.
First, many rhetoricians have employed Foucault in their studies.¹⁵ He has been
included in standard texts for graduate and undergraduate rhetorical history and
criticism classes (Bizzell and Herzberg 1990; Brock, Scott, and Chesebro, third
Foucault is mentioned in Lyotard's groundbreaking volume *The Postmodern
Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (xix) as a skeptic of master-narratives, and is
named at the end of Thomas Kent's *Paralogic Rhetoric: A Theory of Communicative Interaction* as an "externalist philosopher" (170), which includes him in the vanguard of rhetorical thought on human interaction. Scholars who study reading and writing cite Foucault as one of the preeminent scholars on power, political resistance, and knowledge in discourse communities (Berlin 1987; Donahue and Quandahl 1989; Giroux 1983; Miller 1991; Scholes 1985). The opening essay of Sullivan and Qualley's *Pedagogy in the Age of Politics* (Greene) begins with a quotation from Foucault's *Discourse on Language* (1). Foucault appears in the intersection between hermeneutics, politics, and philosophy as the scholar who "reduces philosophical theology to power politics" (Rosen 189). He emerges as "the person who has taught us to analyze history through institutionally situated discursive practices" (Culler 63).

Second, Foucault's work is significant in performance studies. Forty percent of the collected essays in the volume *Critical Theory and Performance*, edited by Reinelt and Roach, reference Foucault's theories. Most often, authors use Foucault as a source for their discussion of power in society and how power transfers to performance. The performances discussed in the volume range from plays to performance art to jazz. In his essay on theory after the Cold War, Jim Merod compares Foucault to jazz musicians: "as a theorist and as a jazz critic, I cannot hear the words of Michel Foucault or Paul de Man without hearing also Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker" (193). Merod continues, "I cannot hear Pops and Bird... without recognizing the liberating hope and self-eviscerating vigilance at work..." (193). The comparison of jazz's frenetic style and content...
with Foucault's earnest intensity seems appropriate. We may have trouble discerning the path of a Foucault essay, just as it can be hard to follow a jazz solo. But both serve to help us see the intricacies of the music or theory at hand. Foucault's discourse on power, language, and knowledge adds to the "epistemological critique" (Reinelt and Roach 5) that has recently emerged in performance studies.

Self and agency in Foucault

Agency is an important tenet in rhetoric. Who has the power to speak in what circumstances determines much about the creation of arguments. Some arguments are excluded if their proponents do not have the agency to articulate them. For example, an assault victim may have less power to tell his story than his assailant might, depending on the audience. Agents retain the power to speak or write as they need and choose. Agency indicates the ability, including the social power, we have to express ourselves.

Foucault's writings related to agency seem contrary to his postmodern stance on interpretation because the agent seems to disappear from the equation of meaning. In his article "What is an Author?" Foucault determines that "the name of the author remains at the contours of the texts" (123), placing authors (named individuals) in the roles of delineating one text from another by virtue of identification. But an author's name does not encapsulate the author; her name is "situated in the breach, among the discontinuities, which gives rise to
new groups of discourse" (123). Consequently, instead of identifying an individual, the name of an author "characterize[s] the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society" (124). Authors become signifiers of particular conversations. When we say "a Platonic ideal," we do not necessarily refer to something Plato wrote, but rather something encompassed by ideas and discourses that could be attributed to Plato.

An erasure of the author concerns scholars who consider agency a primary source of power, and with obvious reason. If a text’s creator, signified by a person’s name, is only a description of the "legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine and articulate the realm of discourses" (130), then people seem to drop out of the meaning-making process. However, considering the author as a descriptor of discourse is not the same as discarding the individual interpreter of texts. Foucault argues that the "author-function" (130) does not refer "to actual individuals insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy" (131). Instead of destroying individual sets of meaning, Foucault indicates individual sets of meanings come together to make a collective author-function. Foucault’s "author-function" is not the destructive force many scholars perceive. It does not discount individual agency. For more evidence of Foucault’s support of agency, we must turn to his discussion of power and the individual.

In an interview with French journalist Gérard Raulet, Foucault makes a statement about the relationship between power, truth, and the individual. The
relationship between power and the individual is one measurement of agency. Foucault argues:

If I tell the truth about myself, as I am now doing, it is in part that I am constituted as a subject across a number of power relations which are exerted over me and which I exert over others. I say this in order to situate what for me is the question of power. . . . I am not developing a theory of power. I am working on the history, at a given moment, of the way reflexivity of self upon self is established, and the discourse of truth that is linked to it. (PPC 39)

Foucault's construction of a "subject across a number of power relations" does not discount the individual. Rather, it acknowledges individuals are constituted and influenced by the power relationships they exercise and those exercised upon them. The individual is shaped by cultural forces, yet she is not lost. Rather, she remains as an interpreter, or author, whose interpretations are guided by those power relations.

In an interview with Stephen Riggins, Foucault discusses his childhood and the influence war had on his life. The power relationships between war and cultural identity shape Foucault's interpretation of his childhood. In this extended quotation, Foucault explores, from his adult perspective, how the power generated by a complex cultural institution such as war shaped his agency to speak of his childhood.

The menace of war was our background, our framework of existence. Then the war arrived. Much more than the activities of
family life, it was these events concerning the world which are the substance of our memory. I say "our" because I am nearly sure that most boys and girls in France at this moment had the same experience. Our private life was really threatened. Maybe that is the reason why I am fascinated by history and the relationship between personal experience and those events of which we are a part. I think that is the nucleus of my theoretical desires. . . . We did not know when I was ten or eleven years old, whether we would become German or remain French. We did not know whether we would die or not in the bombing and so on. When I was sixteen or seventeen I knew only one thing: school life was an environment protected from exterior menaces, from politics. And I have always been fascinated by living protected in a scholarly environment, in an intellectual milieu. Knowledge is for me that which must function as a protection of individual existence and as a comprehension of the exterior world. I think that's it. Knowledge as a means of surviving by understanding. (PPC 7)

Foucault took his agency from the situation by choosing to remain in the scholarly realm, where he felt safe and protected. The passage represents Foucault's "discourse of truth" relating to the "reflexivity of self" he possesses about his childhood. War has shaped Foucault, and he in turn has shaped the discourse around war by deconstructing his own personal involvement with the
concept. Foucault was able to remain an agent in a time of great powerlessness by choosing the environment in which he felt most comfortable.

As Foucault notes above, "knowledge" works as "a means of surviving by understanding." We create our personal truths through knowledge, and speaking these truths helps us retain our agency. Sarup captures Foucault's argument regarding the relationship between power, agency, and knowledge in this passage:

For Foucault, then, conceiving of power as repression, constraint or prohibition is inadequate: power "produces reality"; it "produces domains of objects and rituals of truth." Foucault remarks that we often hear the cliché "power makes mad," but we should consider the fact that the exercise of power itself creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge. Conversely, knowledge induces effects of power. It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power.

When we articulate our knowledge, regardless of power relationships, we retain our agency as text-creating, text-interpreting beings.

Foucault is tied to rhetoric thanks to his concern for discourse, power structures, and the multifaceted self created with language. For Foucault, discourse creates culture and power relationships within culture. I examine Foucault's synthesis of culture and language by examining, first, his understanding of discourse and language structures. Then I will take up
Foucault’s discussion of the power in/of language. I cover Foucault’s notion of problematization as a third feature of Foucault’s language theories.

**Foucault and language structures**

Discourse is one of Foucault’s central tenets of his language theories. Discourse constitutes the main linguistic interaction between individuals, though the individual does not constitute these discourse practices. Instead, the individual is a product of the discourses. As Foss, Foss, and Trapp note, Foucault argues, “The human being is the creation of our current way of talking about human beings” (222). Only in our created discourse are we created. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault refers to discourse:

> instead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word “discourse,” I believe that I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements . . . (80)

Foucault’s conception of discourse is certainly not static, which makes a complete definition of discourse hard to attain. Discourse may be small or large, more or less powerful, depending on the number and kind of people who participate. In
any case, a discourse (discourses, discourse statement, discursive practices) is the foundation of our social reality.

A *statement*, which is the building block of discourse, is equally complicated. A statement is defined as:

not therefore a structure (that is a group of relations between variable elements, thus authorizing a possibly infinite number of concrete models); it is a function of existence that properly belongs to signs and on the basis of which one may then decide through analysis or intuition, whether or not they 'make sense,' . . . [a statement is] a function that cuts across a domain of structures and possible unities, and which reveals them, with concrete contents, in time and space. (*AK* 86-87)

Statements are not sentences, nor are they always governed by the rules of logic (Foss et. al. 217). Foss, Foss, and Trapp define a statement as "a set of signs or symbols to which a status of knowledge can be ascribed" (217). The "status of knowledge" is then established by understanding the "cultural code, characteristic system, structure, network, or ground of thought that governs the language, perception, values, and practices of an age" (216). Because of their creation within a culture, statements are understood to be true in particular cultures and false in others. Statements are governed by our belief systems, so grammatical rules apply less accurately than do epistemological rules (Foss et. al. 217). Statements gathered together, fueled by an ideology, make up our discourse(s). These discourses, in turn, help us create realities.
Discourse in and of itself is not the most pressing issue here. Discourse shapes the culture around it. How we use active discourse to create cultural realities—knowledge—is Foucault’s main interest. Foss, Foss and Trapp argue that “for Foucault, knowledge and discursive practices are inseparable” (217). How knowledge emerges from cultural practice is Foucault’s central concern.

In Foucault’s analysis, discourse creates “forms of continuity” that, in turn, shape genres of thought, cultural institutions, and disciplines of knowledge. Medicine is an example of a discipline of knowledge. The field has knowledge relating specifically to it, including particular vocabularies and ideas. As these genres, institutions, or disciplines become established within our culture, their discourse becomes privileged. Foucault argues institutions “speak” this way about their ability to retain power from their institutional discourse: “we’re here [the institutions] to show you discourse is within the established order of things, that we’ve waited a long time for its arrival, that a place has been set aside for it . . . and if it should happen to have a certain power, then it is we, and we alone who give it that power” (AK 216).

Foucault’s goal is to break apart institutions, genres, or knowledge bases, instead of letting the monolithic discourses representing them stand unchallenged: “Once these immediate forms of continuity are suspended, an entire field is set free” (AK 26). Our tendency to grant great power to institutions in our culture, such as medicine, creates these monolithic discourse continuities that must be disrupted. With constant exposure, we speak—without thought—
the discourse assigned to the cultural institution. Foucault asks us to challenge traditions:

We must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset; we must oust those forms and obscure forces by which we usually link the discourse of one man with that of another; they must be driven out from the darkness in which they reign. (AK 22)

By questioning “groupings” of thought, we may illustrate how our discourse creates the power structures that force together the ideas in an entity such as medicine.

Foucault questions the arbitrary connections we make between discourses which privilege the discourses. He argues the connections are arbitrary: “The question posed by language analysis of some discursive fact or other is always: according to what rules could other similar statements be made? . . . how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?” (AK 27).

Somehow, our culture manages to privilege one discourse over another (evolution over creation, for instance), and that discourse ends up shaping a cultural institutions (we teach evolution in our school systems). Language scholars must disrupt and disassemble discursive cultural structures. Foucault notes that, “of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to the language (langue) and to speech. It is this ‘more’ that we must
reveal and describe” (AK 49, italics in original). When we look for the “more,” what we find are the power relationships shaping discourse formations.

Each classification of language structure builds upon the previous configuration. Statements form discourses, which form larger institutions. Foucault refers to the largest language structures as *codes*, which spring up around institutions. For example, Foucault argues, “up to the end of the eighteenth century, three major explicit codes—apart from the customary regularities and constraints of opinion—governed sexual practices: canonical law, the Christian pastoral, and civil law” (HS 37). Sexuality was regulated by these particular codes, which were regulated by larger cultural institutions, namely the church and the polis.

These cultural discourse structures, or codes, also have “coded contents and qualified speakers” (HS 29). Qualified “code speakers” can affect or change cultural language structures. In relation to Foucault’s example, only priests, pastors, and judges could speak the appropriate codes regarding sexual behavior. When qualified speakers choose not to change the code, the code remains. Intellectuals, of course, are part of the qualified speakers of the code of “knowledge.” In a conversation with theorist Gilles Deleuze, Foucault noted, “intellectuals are themselves agents of [the societal system] of power—the idea of their responsibility for ‘consciousness’ and discourse forms part of the system” (10). Qualified speakers obviously hold the power of discourse in their hands. Foucault claims, “the intellectual’s role is no longer to place himself ‘somewhat ahead and to the side’ in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity;
rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of 'knowledge,' 'truth,' consciousness,' and 'discourse'" (10).

Instead of a privileged status of purveyors of "knowledge," intellectuals must acknowledge the power relationships inherent in ideas like "truth" and "discourse." Merod argues Foucault tried to set up his relationship with knowledge outside this privileged discourse of academics. Merod claims, "Foucault tried for the majority of his writing career to avoid declaring 'interest' except in the most objective way possible. One could think of this habit as 'scholastically political.' Such interest, of course, was always constructed by Foucault to undermine fraudulent authority . . ." (189). As a scholar, Foucault tried to match his personal practice to his writing by acknowledging the "authority" he held in relation to a particular set of knowledge claims. By constructing this distant, objective power relationship to knowledge, he undermines other "fraudulent" authorities who participate in academia. However, Foucault cannot escape his status as a "code speaker." His appearance in forty percent of a collection's essays (referenced earlier in the chapter) marks him as a significant claimant in the stakes of knowledge. His attempt to keep himself "scholastically political" and relatively disinterested cannot completely erase his academic affiliation or his status as a privileged speaker.

Separating discourse relationships from the power relationships they create is difficult. It may not, in the long run, be necessary to do so. However, for the purpose of this chapter, I provide a separate discussion on Foucault's
conceptions of power, since Foucault's power theories are important to understanding his viewpoints on language.

**Foucault and power**

Foucault's relationship to the concept of power is complex. The concept of power is central to all of his writing. According to Sarup, "whereas we might normally regard knowledge as providing us with power to do things that without it we could not do, Foucault argues that knowledge is a power of others, the power to define others. In [Foucault's] view knowledge ceases to be a liberation and becomes a mode of surveillance, regulation, and discipline" (73).

Power is the controlling factor in our lives: we are shaped by the "powers that be," and the social powers we cannot control.

Foucault's studies of sexuality provide particular social arenas for studying "power challenges." Foucault argues, "sexuality, in so far as it is, in every society, and ours in particular, [is] heavily regulated" (HS 102). Foucault studies sexuality in part to explore specific questions: "what is power? And, to be more specific: how is it exercised, what exactly happens when someone exercises power over another?" (HS 102). Transgression may become part of that exercise of power. Sarup notes, "Traditionally, power has often been thought of in negative terms and been seen as an essentially judicial mechanism: . . . to have power is to say
no. And the challenging of power thus conceived can appear only as
transgression” (81, italics added).

The transgressive power we exercise when we work against established
power formations applies to our selves as well.17 As he argues for the existence
of a prohibitive, regulatory set of power structures, Foucault also claims we use
power to define our selves (and others) and our actions. This definitional power
provides us with a way to work around constructed social norms and influences.

For Foucault, power works in both directions. Power is both repressive and
generative at the same time. The “transgression” of working against established
power structures is not a transgression, but a transduction:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did
anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to
obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is
simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says
no, but that it traverses and produces things . . . forms knowledge,
produces discourse. (PK 119)

Power can be generative and destructive. But no matter whether power is a
negative or positive influence, Foucault claims, “power is the problem that has to
be resolved” (PPC 104). Foucault’s focus on power is evident in the subjects he
studied—sexuality, prisons, criminals. Foucault conjectures that institutions
such as prisons are actually socially constructed ideas governed by discourse
formations revealed by examining the power relationships within the language
that formed them. A prison is actually someone’s conception of “prison.”
His dual view of power makes it difficult for Foucault to provide a sweeping statement about what power is or does. Instead, Foucault argues he is not after an overarching concept of power. Rather, he is interested in finding the power relations inherent in language, which are "smaller" than the power structures we find in cultural regulations. In his interview with Raulet, he claims, "when I speak of power regulations, of the forms of rationality which can rule and regulate them, I am not referring to Power—with a capital P—dominating and imposing its rationality upon the totality of the social body. In fact, there are power relations. They are multiple, they have different forms, they can be in play in family relations, or within an institution, or an administration" (38 PPC, italics added). Foucault wants to uncover the small powers which we might not think about, ones shaping how we celebrate our god, whether we celebrate with a "priest" or "preacher," and whether we can reach our god by ourselves or need intercession. Small power relations shape our ideologies and discourse formations and build the larger power relationships and social structures we call church.

In a conversation with Gilles Deleuze, late in Foucault's life, Foucault stated:

... to this day we have yet to fully comprehend the nature of power... Theories of government and the traditional analyses of their mechanisms certainly don't exhaust the field where power is exercised and where it functions. The question of power remains a
total enigma. Who exercises power? And in what sphere?

("Intellectuals and Power" 13-14)

Foucault never solved the enigma of power. However, he used power as a
starting point for many different inquiries of language and culture. For Foucault,
power is both generative and destructive. Power can change systems for better or
worse. As agents, we choose how to use power, even when we appear
"powerless," as prisoners appear. Even prisoners, according to Foucault,
"[possess] an individual theory of prisons, the penal system, and justice. It is this
form of discourse which ultimately matters, a discourse against power, the
counter discourse of prisoners . . . " ("Intellectuals" 11). Power is a tool. We have
power over power.

Foucault introduces various notions of text, context, and interpretation
with his ideas about discourse, power, and agency. Problematization is an
amalgam of Foucaultian theory. Problematization is useful for finding more and
different interpretations of particular texts and contexts. Like any other
Foucaultian concept, problematization is a complex idea. I explore
problematization as a general theory of history/interpretation and explain where
I see its complexities.
Foucault and problematization

Problematization is a way to understand the context and influence of a particular concept, phrase, idea, or institution. Foucault defined problematization in one of his last interviews. He argues:

The notion common to all the work that I have done since [A History of Madness] is that of problematization . . . problematization doesn’t mean representation of a pre-existing object, nor the creation by discourse of an object that doesn’t exist. It is the totality of discursive or non-discursive practices that introduces something into the play of true and false and constitutes it as an object for thought . . . (PPC 257)

Problematization allows us to think through articulated cultural connections within a topic/term/idea and trace the patterns of that topic’s influence on other cultural institutions. The “true and false” of these “discursive or non-discursive practices” depends on how we construe something as “an object for thought.”

Problematization is thoroughly postmodern in its ability to explore many facets of a topic. Which “truth” or “falsity” we choose to pursue will guide the discoveries we make by problematizing a topic.

Problematization illuminates dis/continuities embedded in culturally created terms or institutions. According to May:

In Foucault’s texts, continuities and discontinuities are woven together to form a history which, though recognizable as our history, makes us appear strange to ourselves. This is not because
Foucault arbitrarily lumps together historical items that are in reality separate, but *because he uses unities that are generally forgotten in order to raise questions about unities that are taken for granted as natural.* (103, italics added)

Problematization is a tool of discovery. It helps us understand where things came from, where they seem to be going, and what connections have been made along the way. The process of problematizing a particular cultural institution or construction helps us understand communication as an arbitrary, human-made entity. Ideas we took for granted will not appear so "natural" when carefully scrutinized. Problematization is a challenge to assumptions, and a challenge to the composition of cultural institutions. Problematization provides a starting point for language inquiry, identifying the constituent parts of a particular subject. The negotiation involved in problematizing a concept does not necessarily "solve problems" as one would dis/prove a hypothesis (a problematic). Problematization elucidates connections within communication (which may be un/conscious or un/intended) and often complicates what appears to be uncomplicated. Problematization enables us to untangle some of the complexities in communication.

Problematization is done by individuals; consequently, it affects their conceptions of particular terms. Foucault brings the individual to the center of his work in problematization (Privitera 122), thus providing another avenue for agency within his language theories. Previously, Foucault's work had been focused on ideas and their being, or power relations and their effects on ideas.
Problematization is an outgrowth of two of Foucault’s signature approaches to history: archaeology and genealogy. Foucault’s archaeologies—his examinations of discourse structures—make it possible to understand the ways the discourse of a particular topic arises. His genealogies, the studies of how theories are practiced, help us see how theories of knowledge, power, and domination are performed in culture. When we scrutinize terms, we find a complex and tangled mass of cultural norms composed of even more cultural concepts.

Problematizing is, to a large extent, trying to “untangle” the relationships forged between cultural norms, including their linguistic expressions. In enacting a theoretical approach such as problematization, Foucault brings the subject (the individual) to the fore and studies how she acts and is acted upon as the result of the knowledge/power relationships. The individual is involved in truth negotiation as she contextualizes herself in the world. Is she a “teacher” or a “student”? “Employee” or “peer”? Problematizing these terms means two things: 1) exploring the effects of power structures and discourse strategies on the terms, and 2) examining the effects in light of the individual’s behavior. Both tasks involve individual perceptions and conclusions and the acting out of those perceptions. Two individuals’ problematizations of a term such as “teacher” may not match. The differences in interpretation may result thanks to the difference in the individuals’ history. In any case, no matter who problematizes what concept, it is still one interpreter making the decisions about cultural connections.
Problematization and history

Part of the difficulty involved in problematization is the sweep of history it may include. Castel challenges Foucault's notion of problematization in his essay "'Problematization' as a Mode of Reading History." Castel notes problematization can be a useful, if difficult, methodology for understanding cultural concepts (237) because of the double sense of history one must hold in order for problematization to be successful. Castel argues that deciphering a "history of the present" is helpful, because "[it] enables history to take a double look back. It sheds light on how contemporary practices function, showing that they continue to be structured by the effects of their heritage. But it also sheds light on the entire development of [a particular topic] by showing that the history of this development began before [the topic's] official birth" (244).

Despite the "entire development" of a historical topic, Castel sees a problem with leaving out an "official history," or the culturally sanctioned history of the topic at hand. If problematizing theorists disregard a privileged history, they may miss an important feature shaping the current incarnation of the subject. Castel concedes there is no "official history" in postmodernism, but we need to pay homage, at least in some sense, to the historians' tasks (242). Otherwise we may take "what is qualified to serve," and leave the rest as unimportant (242-43). Sarup argues problematization per se works to break free from an officially sanctioned history. Foucault's ideas are an attempt to separate
inevitability from history: “Foucault breaks off the past from the present and, by demonstrating the forthrightness of the past, relativizes and undercuts the legitimacy of the present” (63). History becomes an even playing field, with all stories given consideration. Foucault’s idea of problematization combines analysis of the past and the present of cultural institutions to understand what meanings, performances, and other cultural institutions have been attached to the term under discussion.

Problematization suggests interaction with, and mutual dependence on, other cultural forces, including history. Postmodernists theorize history is a web of ideas and interactions. More than one history—of a time period, of a subject, of an idea—can exist simultaneously. What becomes “history” is usually the story of the victor, or the story that becomes dominant when “history” is retold. Problematization allows us to probe dominant stories to illuminate stories that were not allowed dominance, for one reason or another. Elucidating the non-dominant ideologies within a term or cultural institution allows us to make choices about which ideology should remain dominant. Here is the connection between problematization and argument (rhetoric): to problematize is to decide which

Problematization has several actual problems. First, the sweep of history a problematization may encompass can loom large. Second, following the “wrong” thread of a problematization might not lead you to the information you desire. But that second concern raises an adjunct question: is there a wrong branch of a web to follow? No matter how we trace our problematizations, we
are still working toward opening the social, historical contexts contained within a particular term or institution. Castel articulates the challenges within problematization:

> every problematization carries with it a risk . . . . It attempts a rereading of historical material from the standpoint of categories—in this case, social categories such as instability, vulnerability, protection, exclusion, insertion, and so forth—that are not utilized by historians to organize their own corpus. In other words, a problematization constructs another account from historical data. But still it must be compatible with the accounts of historians. Thus a problematization must satisfy two demands whose coexistence can itself be a problem. (251)

Castel reminds us of the prominence of the “official history” in constructing a problematization. Disagreeing with the official stories can pose a problem. However, Foucault’s challenge to us is to sort through the fixed, authoritative narratives to understand which ones have been sidelined in favor of the “official history.”

**Problematization and Anderson**

Problematization seems rather large for a study as small as this one. We have no real way of approaching the entire history of performance art, the history of the art world, or the history of women artists. Instead, we have to
choose our terms to problematize and expand from there. I can access much of
the history of Anderson and her performances. I shall keep problematization
within the context of a particular performance in Chapter Four. I extrapolate the
concept of “particular problematization” to other areas of English studies, such as
professional communication, in Chapter Five. Limiting my context to the art
world of a woman artist in the last third of the twentieth century provides a
frame of reference with enough information to problematize a “thicker
description” of Anderson’s works. Instead of problematizing Anderson’s works
in relation to the entire history of art and/or civilization, I problematize them
“against themselves,” relating the terms I use to how they were (or were not)
previously used in Anderson’s pieces. Obviously, some amount of art history is
important to this discussion, because Anderson herself is a “product” of art
history and the art she studies. If this dissertation focused exclusively on a
problematization of Anderson, the necessity of historical exploration is much
greater. As it stands now, Anderson is a component of a larger issue; her art is
interpreted in light of problematization and performance. The ability to choose
what or where or when you want to problematize is one of the benefits of
problematization, no matter the size of the study. The inquiry you create can
begin, or end, anywhere within the topic.

Problematization provides an excellent opportunity to contextualize the
texts within a performance. Foucault argues that when we problematize, we
exercise and explore “the strategies, the networks, the mechanisms, all those
techniques by which a decision is accepted and by which that decision could not
but be taken in the way it was . . .” (PPC 104). A performance is a result of a decision made to enter a concept into “the play of true and false.” Problematizing performances illuminates the relationships between texts, including the influence texts have over one another. Bringing the concept of problematization to performance and communication studies suggests a new way to approach several areas of inquiry, including argument formation. As I’ve mentioned, part of a problematization is choosing whether or not to explore the dominant or non-dominant ideology present within a term. The choice we make helps us understand how arguments are formed within and around that term.

**Problematization and further application**

Bizzell and Herzberg note Foucault “enriches and complicates the notion of context with a network of archives, disciplines, institutions, and social practices that control the production of discourse” (1128). “Complication” is a key concept in Foucault’s scholarship. His approach to language, power, and cultural constructions is complex and complicated. Even when we think we grasp Foucault’s philosophies, another sentence or term emerges to further complicate what we have just begun to understand. Problematization is an example of one of Foucault’s most complicated conceptions. Had he lived
longer, he may have developed problematization to the extent he developed
other concepts, such as his premises of archaeology and genealogy.

In creating this chapter I have touched upon only a small portion of
Foucault’s scholarship. To extensively cover Foucault and his language/power
theories requires a study much longer than this chapter. My exploration of
Foucault focuses on the importance of the combination of three of Foucault’s
essential elements of culture: language, power, and cultural structures.
Problematization is one form of understanding emerging from the combination
of these three cultural elements. Problematization demonstrates how language
and power contextualize the social and cultural structures/ideas/thought
processes acting upon the individual. To problematize a concept—such as
sexuality or identity— is to represent the cultural forces (including ethnicity,
context, time frame, age, sex, race, and any other cultural construction) which
determine how we think about that concept. The spiral of cultural institutions
and cultural connections continues, builds, and recedes. We uncover more and
more links to explore, and the web of problematization expands.

I use Foucault’s notion of problematization to explore artifacts from the
career of performance artist Laurie Anderson. Chapter Four provides a forum to
discuss one of Anderson’s most complex and intriguing works, one full of
cultural institutions and rich problematizations—her concert movie, Home of
the Brave.
Ironically, problematization may not bring us closer to understanding. Foucault ponders whether or not the strength of problematization makes a difference in understanding culture:

There is irony in those efforts one makes to alter one’s way of looking at things, to change the boundaries of what one knows and to venture out a ways from there. Did mine actually result in a different way of thinking? Perhaps at most they made it possible to go back through what I was already thinking, to think it differently, and to see what I had done from a new vantage point and in a clearer light. . . . I seem to have gained a better perspective on the way I worked—gropingly, and by means of different or successive fragments—on this project . . . . It was a matter of analyzing, not behaviors or ideas, nor societies and their “ideologies,” but the problematizations through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought—and the practices on the basis of which these problematizations are formed. (UP 11, italics in original)

Instead of analyzing behaviors or ideologies within ideas, we must, instead analyze how behavior, ideology, and ideas work together to shape our world.

How is culture a version of “being offer[ing] itself to be”? Anderson’s version of culture may demonstrate a very different form of “being.” Problematization provides a tool to contextualize her performances.
Intermission: a bridge to analysis

In the first three chapters of this work I outline several significant theoretical bodies of work, including performance theory, narrative theory, visual theory, and Michel Foucault’s ideas about language, power, and culture. Taken separately, each intellectual grouping is significant as a set of critical tenets, especially when connected to the rhetorical tradition from which these critical tenets emanate. However, when these ideas are brought together, they become more powerful: they form a way to examine cultural artifacts, placing emphasis on performance and power and including elements of production. In the next chapter I begin to explore what this synthesized point of view means for my examination of the artistic works of Laurie Anderson.

Each element of this dissertation adds a particular focus to my analysis of Anderson. Performance studies provides the language to examine communicative instances as performances, points in time when an individual makes a conscious decision to make a show. A performance provides a particular, considered viewpoint on a topic constructed around the concept of demonstrating/enacting that point of view. Performance is significant to our meaning-making: “performance . . . makes or constitutes cultural identity as well as imitates it” (Turner 9). Performances can include textual elements such as narratives and visuals, which are the particular elements included in Anderson’s works. Narratives furnish personal, identifiable viewpoints within
the performance. As Fisher claims, “regardless of the form they are given, recounting and accounting for constitute stories we tell ourselves and each other to establish a meaningful life-world” (62). A performed narrative provides an intimate view on a particular angle of the performer’s life. Visuals can enhance particular points in a narrative or provide alternate/multiple meanings to complicate the text at hand. As Barton and Barton claim, visuals are a significant “site of power inscription” (“Modes” 138). Narratives and visuals work within a performance to add more persuasive elements to the argument which generates the performance.

Foucault’s language theories add another significant dimension to the epistemological discussions of the first three chapters. Foucault’s language analysis gives us a starting point for examining persuasion and power structures within the language of our performances. Our language structures, recognized, remembered, and repeated to create cultural codes, help establish the governing constructions of culture itself. Foucault’s identification of these cultural codes helps us discern some of the power structures in culture that we un/consciously obey as “rules” or “authority.” For example, Foucault recognizes medicine as an authoritative cultural structure; we do not think to challenge it because the cultural ideas embedded within medicine (medical help can be trusted, doctors are not wrong) are fixed in our collective consciousness. Foucault’s tactic of problematization provides us with some suggestions for examining “the play of true and false” that surrounds an idea such as medicine. To problematize is to consider the cultural connections between and within objects, entities, or
institutions. Problematization deconstructs to illustrate power structures and gives us insight into the cultural production of the object/institution at hand. Problematization allows us to consider where our notions about medicine come from, including how to disrupt or change those notions.

Considering the elements of performance within the context of power structures, cultural codes, and problematization gives us several angles from which to approach Chapter Four's analysis. My artifact consists of several performances by Laurie Anderson collected on her concert film *Home of the Brave*. Narratives and visuals have been selected as performance elements to analyze because of their prevalence in Anderson’s work. Her narratives and visuals will be the primary texts considered within her performances. However, the richness of the artifact demands more than narrative and visual analysis. Anderson’s performances must also be considered in terms of performance theory and Foucault’s “play of true and false” that constitutes his idea of problematization. I call my analysis a “problematization” based on its similarity to Foucault’s concept; my inquiry attempts to illustrate cultural connections within the artifact in the spirit of problematization. Because of the infinite number of cultural connections involved, a complete problematization of any thing or idea is not possible. The myriad connections elicited within a problematization allow the process to continue to infinity. In Chapter Four I begin a problematization that works to remain narrow by limiting itself to explorations of the artifact in light of the performance, narrative, visual, and language theories that arise from Chapters One, Two, and Three.
My thesis for Chapter Four revolves around the title of Anderson’s movie: *Home of the Brave*. Anderson’s film explores the cultural representation of this phrase, a continuation of her investigations of the larger cultural concept of “America.” Several titles of her major concert tours and performances relate to America as a whole, most notably *United States Parts I-IV* (originally titled and performed as *Americans on the Move*), completed before *Home of the Brave*, and *Empty Places*, a photodrama/performance of the “dark side” of American cities, done after the film. Anderson finds artistic and cultural significance in examining what are presumed to be “homogenous” values of Americans, including valor, bravery, patriotism, respect, and love. *Home of the Brave* is an extended meditation on “universal” American values.

My specific thesis statement that guides Chapter Four is this: in *Home of the Brave*, Anderson argues for alternate versions of “bravery” as found in America. The “bravery” demonstrated by the characters in Anderson’s film is not patriotic valor in wartime, nor is it unflinching determination in the face of adversity. Rather, Anderson’s film provides us with interpretations of behaviors and attitudes that reflect “coping” kind of braveries Americans use to get through national and personal rough spots. The phrase “home of the brave” reflects the infusion of non-traditional versions of courage into traditional bravery. Anderson makes these arguments for non-traditional bravery with the narratives and visuals she projects as part of her film.
To facilitate my analysis, I have created a list of particular topics that spring from my thesis and deserve attention in Chapter Four. I limit my problematization of Anderson’s notion of “bravery” to the starting points below:

- How does Anderson show us and/or tell us about bravery? How do her performances reflect the quality of showing? What are the conditions of production that allow her to show us what she does?

As I consider Anderson’s showing techniques, I will explore the argument she makes in her performance. As I argue in Chapters One and Two, the quality of showing is part of what makes a performance a performance. Anderson’s particular version of showing is unique to her, produced by the artistic and larger cultural conditions that surround her career. In Chapter Four I will illustrate Anderson’s particular qualities of showing that arise from the specific circumstances that “produce” her and her art. I will also consider how her qualities of showing contribute to her argument-making abilities. I will include a brief discussion of Anderson’s use of technology. Technology provides Anderson with particular ways to show, and she reaches particular audiences with technology that she might not reach otherwise.

- What do Anderson’s narratives and visuals contribute to her discussion of American “bravery”? How do these two performance elements argue for or against the notion of “home of the brave”?

Anderson’s narratives and visuals are the vehicles which carry her arguments. They must either support her idea of non-traditional bravery or refute the cultural notion of conventional bravery. Her narratives and visuals can work together or “against” each other. Narratives can complicate visuals, and visuals can tangle the meanings of narratives. In Chapter Four I will explore Anderson’s particular narratives and visuals that make arguments for or against “bravery.”
• How is Anderson a “code speaker”? How does she incorporate her cultural power as “artist” within her performances? How does her position as “code speaker” affect her ability to make “culture” with her performances?

Anderson’s position as “artist” gives her access to different kinds and amounts of cultural power. Because she is labeled as an “artist” she is given the chance to influence culture through her art. Even as she tries to subvert cultural standards, such as the traditional definition of bravery, she still participates in the “code” of art because of her assigned status; that “code speaking” damages her chances of truly disrupting the cultural codes at work. In Chapter Four I will explore Anderson’s position as “code speaker” and how that label affects the conditions of production and consumption that envelop Anderson’s artistic work.

These three questions are considered in various ways throughout my analysis of Anderson’s work. The “problematization” produced by these points of inquiry promises to be rich, while leaving room for more insights at a later date.

As I mention in Chapter One, the central question raised in this dissertation is this: how does a close reading of a performance, with an emphasis on power and cultural structures, provide us with new angles for understanding that performance? Part of those “new angles” includes the study of performance elements, such as narratives and visuals, and the examination of how a performance makes specific arguments in its showing. Chapter Four explores my answers to this question through a close reading of Anderson’s performances, including power, cultural structures, and the arguments made by narratives and visuals. Anderson’s cultural arguments are enhanced by her combinations of narratives and visuals, and her understanding of our culture’s
power structures is presented in the narrative/visual mixtures which make up her performance. Chapter Four moves theory into practice and begins the praxis of discerning the complicated elements of a performance.
CHAPTER FOUR:

PROBLEMATIZING CULTURE WITH LAURIE ANDERSON

The study of rhetoric . . . totters unsteadily between intellectual inquiry and the mundane transactions of common life. (Leff 20)

Critique of performance (and the performance of critique) can remind us of the unstable improvisations within our deep cultural performances; it can expose the fissures, ruptures, and revisions that have settled into continuous reenactment. (Diamond 2)

In this chapter I demonstrate the veracity of Leff's claim. Examining the rhetoric of Laurie Anderson provides a glimpse of the mundane turned upside down to become intellectual inquiry. Anderson's rhetoric explores the "fissures, ruptures, and revisions" present in American culture. Anderson's performances engage in the "continuous reenactment" of culture Diamond suggests.

The "definitions" established in Chapters Two and Three are significant for Anderson's work. A performance is a fluid construction, named as such by an interpreter and composed of a showing produced for an audience. Narrative and visual texts provide performance features on which to focus our interpretive energy. Problematization is an examination of the performance that considers the social, cultural, and historical significance of performance elements. These elements are illustrated in my analysis of Laurie Anderson's performance(s). Her topics of analysis are wide-ranging and variable, but they always relate back to American culture as it affects "individuals in the middle of the bell curve,"
whom Anderson calls “nobody” and/or “everyone” (Hansen 36). This chapter is my analysis and interpretation—my problematization—of Anderson's interpretations of American culture. My problematization will, of course, be different than other analyses of Anderson’s work. I may see different connections than other viewers may see. Differences in analysis speak to the postmodern plurality of problematization. We problematize connections relevant to our lives. Illuminating all possible connections within a problematization is impossible, thanks to the vast number of interpretations available to us and the individual perspectives we bring to those interpretations. Postmodern thought processes do not permit a finite problematization. The process of problematization is best referred to as “the process of problematizing,” which indicates the ongoing task of exploration inherent in interpretation.

In this chapter I argue Anderson’s work is a compelling example of how performance problematizes culture. Anderson’s movie *Home of the Brave* is a problematization of a recurrent question in her work: what is bravery? The stories and visuals contained in the movie address the creative and destructive forces in our culture and what it means to be brave in the face of many kinds of threats, including nuclear annihilation. My problematizations in this chapter examine the cultural moment of *Home of the Brave* in terms of Anderson’s career, the artistic climate from which *Home of the Brave* was born, the historical forces in the United States when *Home of the Brave* was created, and how Anderson problematizes these factors in her performances within the film. My problematizations examine the cultural moment of Anderson-as-artist, the
cultural moment of the film, and the cultural moment of bravery in the mid-eighties social and political milieu of America. Foucault’s theoretical vision is present throughout this cultural examination. Foucault’s work allows us to look at the power relationships between entities in Anderson’s film and the culture surrounding her film. Problematization is, at its most basic level, a conscious, careful elucidation of connections between ideas and objects. Foucault’s influences are felt throughout this chapter in the connections I make between Anderson, her art, and the culture surrounding her art.

Home of the Brave and its creator

Laurie Anderson’s background is relatively conventional. She is a traditionally pedigreed artist with a BA (magna cum laude) in art history from Barnard College, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and an MFA in sculpture from Columbia University. She has been awarded honorary doctorates from the Art Institute of Chicago, the San Francisco Art Institute, and the Philadelphia College of Art (Howell 141). Anderson grew up in the Midwest, the daughter of a well-to-do paint manufacturer in Chicago (Smagula 243). Her BA in art history initially specified her as an Egyptologist. She also has extensive classical music training, most extensively in violin: according to art historian Howard Smagula, “until the age of fifteen she was a serious student of the violin and achieved a great measure of technical virtuosity on the instrument” (243). Anderson is well known in the art world. Her art has been shown around the
world, in theatres, museums, and galleries. She held her first performance in 1972, when she arranged cars on the town green of Rochester, Vermont, to play her piece *Automotive*, a song for various pitches of car horns (Howell 148). She has created nine books, between fifteen and twenty sound recordings, four musical scores, for performers ranging from duos to symphonies, two soundtracks, one interactive CD-ROM, and numerous museum installations and full-scale concert performances. Much of her work is enhanced by electronic technology Anderson has built or created.

Anderson compiled extensive documentation of her works in her retrospective book *Stories From the Nerve Bible*. The volume chronicles her career from 1972 to 1992, just after she finished her *Nerve Bible* tour. The book provides event narrations, stage notes, backstage and onstage photos, video stills, musical scores, and “asides” written by Anderson about her pieces. The book is thorough, including a note, photo, or lyric from almost all her pieces, including her car horn piece in Vermont, her “video clone,” and her *Nerve Bible* show, done in Spain, Germany, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv in 1992. Anderson notes in the introduction that this book is her “Talking Book,” a project she abandoned in the Seventies: “a wildly free-form anthology of stories on tape which included fragments of songs, letters, theories about motion, history, and vision. As the narrator spoke and sang, her voice constantly changed into other peoples’ voices. . . . I could never really figure out exactly who was talking or how to organize this cacophonies talking orchestra. When I finished *Stories from the Nerve Bible*, I realized this was the Talking Book” (*NB* 6).
Anderson claims she learned to love performance when she was teaching art history at various colleges in New York City after she finished her MFA. According to Anderson,

... since I wasn't exactly a professional art historian, I wasn't keeping up... so gradually I began to forget the facts... So I'd just make things up, stories about this or that... and the students would write it down and I would test them on it.

Things went on this way for a while until eventually I began to feel sort of guilty and I quit. (Not before I was fired, but it was very, very, close.) Anyway, this is the reason I began to do performances. I discovered that I loved just standing there in the dark, showing pictures and talking. (NB 94)

Anderson's love of performance has been her main artistic activity since the beginning of her career (which coincided nicely with the heyday of Happenings and other performance-oriented conceptual pieces). In late 1972 and early 1973 she slept in public places to find out if "the place can color or control my dreams" (NB 9), including a night court courtroom, a beach at Coney Island, and a bathroom in the Columbia University library. These performances have evolved into the magic technological wizardry of her latest performance, "The Speed of Darkness," on tour in 1996 and 1997. In "The Speed of Darkness," a barefoot Anderson appears on stage with two keyboards, various digital equalizers, harmonizers, and synthesizers, a few microphones, and a signature violin. Her most recent performance is very different than her 1972
"Institutional Dream Series," or *Home of the Brave*. In her variety, Anderson reminds us that performance is everywhere: from tooting cars in a small town to small concert halls to Coney Island beaches.

Anderson's work is well respected. In the January-February 1995 issue of the *Utne Reader*, Laurie Anderson was named as one of the "100 Visionaries Who Could Change your Life." According to Jon Spade, author of the article, "these visionaries are hard-eyed as well as hopeful. They show a remarkable willingness to go beyond the boundaries of their personal agendas or specialties. . . these thinkers live and even relish paradox and tend to be able to hold opposed truths in their minds without sweating. For them, the big, unitary answer that levels, grades, and paves reality like a superhighway is not only not the solution, it is at the very heart of the problem" (57). Anderson reflects that visionary attitude through her explorations of American culture. She does not attempt to find any "big unitary answer;" rather, she examines the small parts of culture for the meanings that pave the superhighway of reality. Anderson follows Foucault's idea of uncovering the "play of true and false" that surrounds an institution or idea; in that exploration, there is no room for big, unitary answers. Howell argues that Anderson's continuous success comes from a constant reinvention of herself: "like any true performance artist, Anderson will derive her cues for the future from an immediate context. By focusing on the process of discovery, Laurie Anderson maintains a palpable connection between life and work that keeps her performances truly alive" (30). Howell's statement echoes the label of "visionary," though he argues her vision comes from being
able to utilize life right now. Howell also notes that, for Anderson, “success is a shared plunge into the unknown” (30). Noting that there are others who share her vision reflects her existence within a larger tradition of American scholars, artists, and cultural critics.

**Anderson as rhetorician**  Anderson must be considered a rhetor as well as an artist if we are to study the persuasive elements in her work. According to Foss, rhetoric can be defined as “the actions human perform when they use symbols for the purpose of communicating with one another” (4). Anderson is not a “conventional” rhetorician—her works are not texts, written in books and discussed in classrooms—but she examines and critiques the symbols around her which communicate culture. The task of cultural critique is part of what rhetoricians do, so Anderson’s work falls in line with Foss’s definition.

Anderson provides this comment on her communication study:

> As an artist I have made many things; performances, prints and drawings, films, records, comics, sculpture, videos, computer animations, and books. But it’s spoken language that has always interested me the most. I believe it’s possible that language is a virus, as William S. Burroughs claims. But to believe that language is a disease, first you have to believe that it is alive. So, is language alive? (*Nerve Bible* 6)

Anderson’s version of “living language” provides narratives and visuals that shift, change and evolve. A shifting point of view does not contribute to an
easily discerned argument. Kellner argues that the language of Anderson's performances (her narratives and visuals) are nothing but sentence fragments of a dialect no one can understand. Kellner notes her 1986 documentary concert film *Home of the Brave* "provides fragments of meaning which do not add up to any clear system of meanings. . . . Her performance is for the sake of performance, in the moment, and does not produce any particular statements, positions, messages or ideologies . . ." (288). Anderson does not directly refer to her personal ideologies in her stories and songs. However, her ideologies are present in her exploration of subjects such as war, death, communication, politics, money, and love, which I demonstrate in my examination of her texts and contexts. Her arguments are subtle and thoughtful. By studying her works closely, we can discern the outlines of her ideologies in the texts she uses. Overt acknowledgment is not necessary. Anderson's subtle arguments allow us to draw our own conclusions about the points of view she presents.

In *Stories From the Nerve Bible*, Anderson argues "basically my work is storytelling, the world's most ancient art form" (150). Jerome Bruner's argument of narrative as verisimilitude figures into Anderson's idea that storytelling is the world's most ancient art form: if art is for helping us understand cultural realities, then storytelling is one of the strongest forms of art for helping us understand cultural truths. Anderson performs her stories with the intensity of a well-practiced orator, on a parallel with William Jennings Bryan or Malcolm X. Her concern for language, alive or dead, chained or not, points to her status as a rhetorician. Anderson does not work in a traditional rhetorician's arena. She is
not in the classroom, in the boardroom, or any profession that rhetoric and/or professional communication usually studies. But art is as much a cultural system of meaning as language is.\textsuperscript{19} Anderson and her counterparts in the art world are ready to be brought into the "rhetorical spotlight" as communicators who discuss and analyze important ideas. A work of art has as much rhetorical impact as any text generated by a "certified rhetorician." Foss argues, in another article, that "the study of visual imagery as communication is surprisingly absent from the communication field; our focus has been primarily on the nature and functions of discursive symbols. . . [but] most of us believe symbolicity is broader than discourse and involves systems such as mathematics, music, and architecture" (85). This chapter's exploration of an rhetorical artifact created by an artist will begin to bring alternate discursive symbol systems into view of communication scholars.

\textbf{Anderson's artistic lineage}

Kardon claims Anderson to be part of the avant-garde tradition in art. According to Kardon, Anderson's art occupies several familiar territories that were carved out by certain New York avant-gardes. . . . Her art works brilliantly within the conventions of juxtaposition and non-sequitur that replaced the exhausted surrealism of the late fifties and early sixties (a surrealism that MTV has revived). These conventions run
through large swathes of New York culture: Robert Rauschenberg in visual art, William S. Burroughs in literature, Merce Cunningham in dance, Richard Foreman, perhaps John Cage in music. These figures have, I think, established the ground out of which Anderson, a member of a new generation, works with ease and aplomb, carefully organizing and orchestrating the random in a way that denies method even as it invokes it. (137)

According to Hughes, the avant-garde artist “is a precursor; the truly significant work of art is the one that prepares the future” (366). Avant-garde artists look to the future to explain the impulses of the now. The avant-garde exists because artists are now free to make a living without patrons or sponsors; we have moved away from the “taste of courts, religious or secular, [which] determined patronage” (Hughes 366). Society’s various tastes can support—emotionally and ideologically rather than monetarily—artists who work against the centuries of artistic tradition. The avant-garde, in its attempt to make new, confrontational works, pushes the boundaries of art farther than artists who stay in line with previous traditions (Hughes 368). Performance art fits into this confrontational, unconventional stance for artists and their work.

Anderson does not fit neatly into any particular American artistic tradition. Her style does not reflect any one artistic heritage but has roots within identifiable postmodern traditions in the art world. Even Dada, a movement from the early twentieth century, is postmodern in its attempt to bring the ordinary into the view of artists and patrons. Levin credits Marcel Duchamp, a
major Dada artist, as the “alchemist” of what became postmodern art: Duchamp "transmut[ed] art from one plane to another, rarefying it, shifting it from the visual to the mental, coaxing it along the perilous process from matter to energy" (16). This transmutation of ideas can be considered part of the postmodern shift towards multiple meanings and juxtaposed ideas. Battcock argues that "modern art is based on a single assumption. That the artwork is only what it is. It is not a picture or a metaphor for something else. It is, say, a photograph... or a painting, first and only" (in Nickas xxi). Postmodern art turns these notions upside down with jokes, fragmented meanings, and pieces that stand for more (or less) than what they appear to be. The most specific traditions important to Anderson’s work are Conceptual art and its outgrowth, performance art.²⁰ For Conceptual artists, “art becomes a phenomenon of the purest sort; everywhere and nowhere, it simply is” (Wheeler 247). For performance artists, “performance, like Conceptual art, would enable the artist to shun mere pictorial values in favor of true visual communication: art as a vehicle for ideas and action” (Nickas xi). Anderson’s work is about being, how we are, as a society, and what beings in action think and do.

**Home of the Brave within Anderson’s body of work**

*Home of the Brave* is one of Anderson’s most complicated projects. I discuss the history of the film because of its complexity and its uniqueness in Anderson’s body of work. Rarely does Anderson do this much collaboration with others to create or produce her work. The film was one of Anderson’s most
extensive collaborations. Anderson tends to be a true "solo" artist. For 1996-7's "Speed of Darkness" tour, Anderson was the only person on stage for her ninety-minute performances as technician and performer. Anderson actively cultivates this sparse aesthetic. *Home of the Brave* was a challenge for Anderson because the film used elements she could not control—namely other people. Seven musicians plus eleven other cast members made up the "actors" of the movie. Anderson spent much of her film time performing her pieces. But she also had to spend time on directing tasks. She says, "I'm not sure I would advise anyone else to star in their own movie. The special blend of schizophrenia and narcissism that you need to split roles can result in a power struggle. Eventually, of course, the director wins" (NB 210).

*Home of the Brave* is loosely called a "concert film" by Anderson (NB 210) because of its unique combination of stories, songs, cultural analysis, and visual performances. The film is based on performances of the 1984 *Mister Heartbreak* tour, which featured pieces from *United States Parts I-IV* (NB 210) and pieces made specifically for the *Mister Heartbreak* tour. The film was shot at the Park Theater in Union City, New Jersey, over a period of ten days in 1985. The audience was bused in from Manhattan for half a day, to provide reactions for performances. The other half of the day was used for shooting scenes that needed no audience (NB 210). *Home of the Brave* was released through Cinemcom International Films in 1986 and shown in small theatres catering to art films.
Anderson’s creative control over *Home of the Brave* was strong, but she states the contributions of the other cast members made the film as spectacular as it was:

Even though I designed the performances to be split-second collaborations between sound, image, and action, it’s the presence and inventiveness of performers that bring the work to life. As film director I did nothing except remind the performers that the cameras weren’t really there. Although most of the performers had been on the sixty-city concert tour, I never thought of them as my band but as guest artists. (NB 213)

Many of her guest artists are well-known performers in their own right. Guitarist Adrian Belew, percussionist David VanTieghem, and back-up vocalists Janice Pendarvis and Dolette McDonald have all worked with more mainstream musicians such as Sting and David Byrne. *Home of the Brave* is richer and more complex than Anderson’s solo performances, in large part thanks to the talents of her guest artists. Even though the collaborative components of the film challenged Anderson’s usual working style, the collaboration produced a very successful film, one that Anderson’s fans and critics regard as one of her strongest pieces.

Despite Anderson’s concerted efforts, her gamble to entertain mainstream film audiences didn’t pay off exactly as she had intended. According to Anderson,
Home of the Brave opened in New York at the 57th Street Playhouse. The reviews were lukewarm and it played for about a week. It had a similar short life in most other cities. I was devastated. I had spent two years on the movie, poured all my energy into it, and it had basically bombed. Eventually it did show up in various film festivals, and was even selected for “Directors’ Fortnight” at Cannes where it received favorable reviews; but my baptism into big-time movies had been a shock. (NB 217)

Anderson’s first foray into “pop culture” didn’t earn her instant success or name recognition. However, when the film was released on videocassette, Laurie Anderson fans immediately purchased it for their collections. Thanks to the fan appreciation of the video, the movie received a wider showing on tape than it did in theatres.

Home of the Brave is significant to Anderson’s career for several reasons. First, it is Anderson’s most involved piece, even more so than United States, Parts I-IV. The scale of United States is larger, because it was performed over several evenings, and the work contains more individual pieces because of its length. However, the number of individuals involved in Home of the Brave is more than double those involved with United States I-IV, and the effort to produce the film was more intense. The film required more monetary backing, personnel, and preparation than any other performance Anderson has completed to date. Second, it is Anderson’s first concerted attempt at preserving a performance. Home of the Brave is Anderson’s first audio/visual recording of
her performance(s) produced for a large audience. Other pieces had been preserved on film, but none had been released into movie theatres or on videotape. A film, on the other hand, can be seen many times, and owned, if it makes it to videotape.

Third, *Home of the Brave* contains some of Anderson's most powerful combinations of narratives and visuals. This third reason is the most significant influence in my choice of artifacts. Anderson has a long career full of performances. I could have chosen any number of artifacts for this analysis. I have chosen to examine components of *Home of the Brave*, because of the narratives and visuals performed within the film. The narratives and visuals make the film complex and intriguing. Some of the pieces in the film are signature works, such as "Sharkey's Night." Other pieces, such as "Zero and One," are not well known, but offer intriguing combinations of narratives and visuals that make her performance ripe for analysis. *Home of the Brave* is one of Anderson's most significant achievements. Though complexity and insightful commentary are typical Anderson hallmarks, *Home of the Brave* is an extended example of both.

*Problematizing the artistic moment of Home of the Brave* Anderson’s film emerged at a particular significant time for performance art. In the art world of the eighties, Anderson had already made a significant impact with her live performances, most notably her magnum opus, *United States, Parts I-IV*, performed in 1983 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. In the early eighties,
performance art was reinventing itself. The seventies had seen an incredible boom of performance pieces, in part because performance artists had the opportunity to “assess their societal function and develop the potential of performance art to approximate reality more closely than traditional disciplines” (Enstice 144). The “organic wedding of [performance] art to a social continuum” provide the chance for artists such as Chris Burden to perform pieces that were alternately serious and whimsical. Burden’s piece Prelue to 220, or 110 placed Burden in immanent danger of electrocution from 110-volt lines immersed in buckets of water at his side. Burden was secured to a concrete floor with copper bands; if the bands and the lines connected through a careless move by a spectator, Burden was a dead artist (Enstice 145). The factors of chance and happenstance were great. If a viewer spilled the buckets, Burden could die. On the other hand, if spectators were careful, Burden was only secured to the floor—nothing very exciting. The potential for real-life drama, however, enhance the piece’s meaning. Burden’s work points out our inability to predict, despite our precautions, the one small accident that could signal our doom. The social impact of this living, breathing art was significant. Art wasn’t just picnics in the park or beautiful dancers. Art could be life and death and the incredibly delicate balance between them.

In the eighties, performance art evolved into a medium less concerned with scaring individuals than with puzzling out social truths. This “second generation” of performance artists, including Laurie Anderson, added more formal performance elements to the social dramas, including a move into more
traditional theatre venues and forms, such as variety theatre and stand-up comedy (Goldberg “Performance” 73). Another significant factor was the “addition” of entertainment to the performance artist’s show (“Performance” 74). No longer was the artist merely point out socially significant events; an artist could entertain as well as enlighten. This new performance work began to test the line between art and entertainment. The art world began to change, in part thanks to the performance artists. The art world was beginning to reach into pop influences while still trying to retain a cutting-edge sensibility. Anderson was part of what some critics called “avant-pop,” a blend of “drama, music, sculpture, and anything else its exponents chose” (“The Rise of Avant-Pop”). Avant-pop took its artistic sensibilities from earlier twentieth century art movements, most notably Dada, from the teens and twenties, and Happenings, from the sixties. Avant-pop artists were taking some of the humor from Dada and the social seriousness of Happenings and merging them into a socially conscious brand of humor for the art world.

Avant-pop had many proponents besides performance artists: graffiti artists such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat took art to the subways, thus making the commodity of art part of the average urban landscape. Artist Jenny Holzer began posting her aphoristic comments on American culture on New York lamp posts in the late seventies (Auping 21). Holzer’s work in the street was regarded as left-wing public service announcements as often as it was considered art. According to critic Michael Auping, the late seventies and the decade of the eighties witnessed an explosion of art in public places. Auping
argues, "leery of the confining and elitist connotations of private galleries and museums, many artists sought out more public situations, where their art could interact as directly as possible with a larger audience" (19). Many artist-run collectives specializing in avant-pop art began in the early eighties, most notably in New York City, including ABC No Rio, Artists’ Space, Fashion Moda, Fun Gallery and the Mudd Club (Stiles 293). Haring and Basquiat eventually moved their work from the streets to SoHo galleries, where they met and collaborated with internationally known pop-artist-force Andy Warhol (Stiles 293).

Anderson’s work did not fit the anti-establishment move to the street. Anderson took the public-art feeling back into galleries and concert halls. Her work was produced for the audience in the artistic venue, not startled individuals encountering a poster on a telephone pole. However, her subject matter brought the people on the street into the concert halls. Anderson’s work meshed with the work of artists like Holzer and Haring: slices of life were her performances, not just part of them. Like Haring’s graffiti art and Holzer’s word art, Anderson’s art reflected the consciousness of the average person, pondering the problems of their life. The humor of Dada, the intensity of Happenings, and the street smarts of art since the sixties were merged on the stages of Anderson’s performances.

Technology is a large part of Anderson’s work. Anderson creates and administers most of the technology she uses on stage. Anderson has been involved in technological art for most of her
career. Anderson uses technology as both an amplifier and a stand-alone element in her work. Technology, such as multiple-voice microphones (when you speak into it, your voice becomes many voices), allows Anderson to augment her presence with "others," even if she creates the others. For Anderson, technology is a way to fill the stage while retaining her singularity. Her technology becomes, in some cases, her art. When Anderson uses her "audio masks," such as the microphone that turns her voice into Sharkey's voice, the technology becomes a significant part of the piece. Anderson's CD-ROM, *Puppet Motel*, is an electronic home for Anderson characters, replete with her signature symbols and stories. Anderson has called technology the "campfire around which we tell our stories" (McCorduck 136). Technology keeps us warm, safe, and together.

However, using technology in a piece is not the only potentially sticky issue for technology in the art world. What about using technology to re/produce one's work? Critic RoseLee Goldberg notes that performance artists were some of the first to translate their art into technologically available media, simply because their performances could be recorded, whether on videotape, television broadcasts, or audio tape and vinyl. This decision to step forward into media technology placed performance artists in an interesting dilemma: should they participate in this technology culture despite its anti-aesthetic attitude, or should they go for the money? Was using technology to distribute one's art a version of "selling out"? How would the art world see this appropriation of technology? Goldberg comments:
To graduate from the art world into real life—into television or into video discs, into feeding the industries that in turn feed the art and allow artists to live on revenue from their own work—has been the goal of many young artists now performing in the early 1980s. . . . Needless to say, the two factions, popular and high art, had been eyeing one another across a fragile divide for some time, with a fairly simple rationale to justify the merger: something so omnipresent as the media must be utilized and adapted, infiltrated and altered, for to avoid it was tantamount to living in the past. . . .

(75)

Technology allows for more thorough distribution and consumption of one's work: a monologue on an audio CD can be heard by many people besides the audience in the concert hall. Technology provides art with a "common culture" base; art can be mass-distributed. The question then becomes whether the mass distribution has tainted the art. If art is only art in the gallery, what is the art we put out on CDs, videocassettes, and mass produced postcards?

The impact of this use of technology is played out in Anderson's work. Anderson's use of highly technical equipment to produce the sounds and images incorporates technology within her art in the art space of concert halls and galleries (her early work, shown in galleries in New York City, incorporated simple technology such as tape recorders). Anderson also uses technology to reach out to consumers, thus bringing her art into the realm of commodity. Anderson doesn't seem to be bothered by these uses of technology, but she is
concerned with the extremities technology can generate. When she was in Israel in 1994, her Israeli promoter showed her some recently created bombs, which led her to a realization about technology:

The first one goes off, and it's fabulous, an orange thing with a beautiful purple tail; the next one makes a huge pop, noting visually. I'm really starting to enjoy this, until I think, wait a second, I'm from the country that is the largest arms supplier in the whole world, talking bombs with the world's second biggest customer, and I'm having a great time! This is really disturbing. That's what high-tech means, really: images of power to me have many connotations. (137)

Anderson's revelation presents us with another conundrum of technology: those with the most wield the most power. Technology, power, and authority are tied closely together. Artists can seize some of this power for art by producing it with technologically advanced means, such as CD-ROMs.

An extended discussion of art, technology, and Anderson is not possible in this chapter because of the extensiveness of the topic. What I suggest here is only a beginning inquiry. Technology is significant for the production and reception of art, and Anderson makes use of the latest technology available to her to reach a larger audience. She uses technology to make her art visually and audially exciting. However, she also understands the impact technology has on the power structures of the world, as evidenced by her experience in Israel. Anderson has tamed technology and made it work for her. At the same time, Anderson
remains aware of the power and impact technology has on the power structures of the world.

**Problematizing bravery in *Home of the Brave***

I have chosen three different pieces from *Home of the Brave* to examine for Anderson’s interpretation of bravery. I will first provide the text and context of the piece, then I will make my arguments regarding the problematization contained within it. Once I’ve explored these performances, I will bring together the themes they present regarding our culture’s versions of bravery. The film’s content is not about bravery, but the influence of the concept appears from the instant we learn the title of the film. Using a line from the “Star Spangled Banner” as a film title is provocative; it elicits themes of nationalism, patriotism, and homage to our country. Anderson proceeds to ask serious questions about such issues during the course of the film.

Foucault’s description of problematization is important for sorting through Anderson’s words and images: “[problematization] is the totality of discursive or non-discursive practices that introduces something into the play of true and false and constitutes it as an object for thought . . .” (PPC 257). In this analysis, I want to examine the narratives and visuals put forth in Anderson’s performance as “discursive practices” that present something—in this case, bravery—into the “play of true and false” that occupies our cultural discourse.
In *Home of the Brave* and throughout her body of work, Anderson uses particular phrases and pictures over and over again. I want to approach Anderson's use of repeated phrases and repeated symbols as a beginning glimpse of Anderson's conception of bravery. These repeating visual and verbal themes "set us up" to interpret individual pieces, such as the ones in *Home of the Brave*, by establishing an "Anderson ideology" as a kind of outline around the rest of her work. They repeating visuals and verbals link the specific topic at hand and Anderson's epistemology. The repetition provides part of the energy Anderson infuses into her pieces. In *Home of the Brave*, Anderson's repeated phrases and symbols point to a lack of awareness and an apathy toward the forces at work in our culture.

**Phrases to make us think**

Anderson chooses several different phrases to repeat throughout her concert film. The sentences seem to represent a particular mindset Anderson has about American culture: as a nation, we are not paying attention. We seem to be neglecting something, or ignoring something. These phrases all relate to bravery, in some way.

- this is the picture
- listen to my heart beat
- home of the brave
- deep in the heart of darkest America
you connect the dots
you pick up the pieces
you’ve already paid for this

These phrases are repeated many times in *Home of the Brave*. They also appear on the movie soundtrack and the album *Mister Heartbreak*, which covered songs from *Home of the Brave* not released on the soundtrack. Sometimes these lines are spoken by Anderson (one by one, or strung together), and sometimes they appear as visuals on the large projection screen behind the stage.

With these phrases, Anderson seems to be asking us to concentrate on something, but she never tells us exactly what it is. She uses the “unattached referents” of *this* and *you* to make her phrases open to everyone: “*this* is the picture”, “*you’ve already paid for this*”, “*you connect the dots*”, “*you pick up the pieces*.” We are in the “home of the brave,” “deep in the heart of darkest America”, and we don’t’ know who *you* are or what/where *this* is. We are also not sure exactly what the “bravery” is in our brave home.

Anderson fills in the answer to “what this is” with several different options described in different pieces: this is Paradise (“Language is a Virus”), this is a dream, (“Talk Normal”), this is love and we’re slightly crazy (“Langue D’Amor”), this is a new day of adventure (“Sharkey’s Day”), or this is trouble (“Sharkey’s Night”). Here in the “home of the brave,” each of us is on a mission to find out exactly what *this* is. What each of us needs may be different: for some, the adventure to the “heart of darkest America” may entail falling in love, or living our dream life in Paradise. For others, the “heart of darkest America”
may be a Conrad-esque journey into the dark, unforeseeable forces of human nature. Anderson never answers the questions of who you is or what this is. We are left to decide for ourselves. We become the you, and we fill in the this with our own answer.

Anderson’s stock phrases ask us to take responsibility for our actions and our beliefs. Anderson’s open-ended definitions of you and this allow for more than one perspective on a topic, so we are all free to create personal definitions. With our choices, we open the topic (“this is Paradise”) for examination and destabilize the idea of a singular true or false interpretation, as Foucault indicates we should. This particular “play of true and false” surrounding you and this also suggests a general warning: be careful of what you wish for, because you might get it (or that). We may need to look for the larger meanings in culture or “pick up the pieces” created by what we’ve demanded. We may “pay for this”, whatever we choose, with anger, sorrow, or resentment. The ultimate warning to us may lie at “deep in the heart of darkest America.” At that place, we may be asked to be honest about who we are or what we want (our you and our this). The dark realizations found in “the heart of darkest America” may not be what we expected to gain from our “home of the brave.” We are also still left to wonder this: what is this “home of the brave”? Who is “the brave”? Is this where we live?

With the admonitions embedded within these phrases, Anderson suggests another point of view on the you and this: if we aren’t careful, those who appear
to be on our side may actually hurt us. This political implications of this warning emerges more clearly in “Sharkey’s Night,” which I cover when I discuss the piece, but it deserves merit in light of Anderson’s repeated phrases. Her reminder that “this is the picture” may provide two warnings: “this will be what happens to us if we’re not careful”, and “this is where we are now.” These warnings are related, and the implications are significant. Those we suppose are honest (those whom we trust to run our country) may not be. We may be lied to, surprised, or completely taken over by those who have previously seemed beneficent.

Symbols to make us think

Anderson inserts several different forms of repeated visuals in her work, including typography (such as words projected on a big screen), socially understood sign systems (such as language, time, maps, charts, grids), line drawings, and specific images, including airplanes, water, hands, eyes, windows, and phones. Anderson also uses the interplay between light and darkness as a visual counterpoint to her narrations (Kardon 127-135). In Home of the Brave these visuals support Anderson’s perspectives on the complicated relationships between humans, language, and culture. All of these repeated visuals are present in the film.

The interplay of light and dark is one of the most significant visual choices Anderson makes. When Anderson is on stage by herself, or with only a few musicians, the spotlight features her. When the entire ensemble performs a
song, the light may still be brighter on Anderson. The consistent illumination of
Anderson throughout the show marks her as the one with the answers, or at
least as a tour guide towards those answers. If she is always "in the spotlight,"
she is always "in focus". This light/dark interplay helps to make Anderson a
version of Foucault's "code speakers", a topic I will return to at the end of the
chapter.

Part of the strength of the repeated symbols happens in combination with
verbals or other visuals. During the performance of "Excellent Birds," the
performers sing "This is the picture" while the phrase "this is the picture" is
projected in capital letters, starting small in the middle of the screen and
growing, expanding quickly and rushing toward the audience. Telephones are a
significant symbol throughout Home of the Brave. The phones point out
communicative insistency: when the phone rings, we answer it. At one point in
the film, a white telephone drops from the ceiling of the theatre, and we hear a
short monologue by Burroughs. In "Sharkey's Day," Anderson carries a phone
and gestures with it when she says "Paging Mr. Sharkey . . . white courtesy
telephone, please." After the performance of "Talk Normal," Anderson calls her
keyboard player Joy Askew and talks with her, rambling about how the concert is
going. Askew is no more than 20 yards from Anderson while this phone
conversation takes place.

Anderson's repeated visuals point to a meta-theme of movement. In the
song "Kokoku," the back screen projects a drawing of a mountain peak. Several
line drawings repeatedly tumble through the sky, over the drawing of the
mountain. These drawings include a TV (a box of moving images), an umbrella (used for flight by Mary Poppins), and lightning bolts (a motion that can strike you dead). At the same time, a ghostly line drawing of a plane flies from right to left across the projection screen, over and over, for the duration of the song. The plane flies in a straight line, crossing the same territory over and over again as the TVs, umbrellas, and lightning bolts repeatedly fall down the sky. We are left with an image of movement going nowhere. In contrast to the projected visuals, the performers on stage, including Anderson, seem very purposeful in their movement. This motion is often a choreographed dance that all performers do. For one song, Anderson provides a conductor's direction with the movements she makes. As she notes, "The time signature for "Smoke Rings" was difficult so I invented a dance to show musicians where the downbeat was" (NB 216). The motions of the live performers are deliberate and purposeful, while the motions of the images on the projection screen seem deliberate but ineffective.

Anderson's repetitive visuals remind us of the difficulties involved in trying to communicate. They do not indicate an epistemological statement, as her repeated verbals do. Instead they point out other aspects of Anderson's "language as virus" theme. The words "This is the picture" rush off the screen almost too fast to read them. The scribbled "notes to herself" that appear on the projection screen during "Talk Normal"—grocery lists, daily lists, research questions—are almost too scribbled to be read, but tantalizing enough to think about. The telephone sequences are all very short, like answering machine messages, and provide only "sound bites" of information. All the repeated
visuals reinforce her uncertainty about the reliability of language. This uncertainty generates questions that are never articulated but are suggested: who can speak? What do our symbol systems really mean? How purposeful are our movements—are we just running in place? A figure running in place is used behind Anderson in the monologue of “White Lilly.” Anderson’s repeated visuals add to these and more questions surrounding the complexity of communication.

Anderson’s repeated phrases and visuals seem more important each time they appear within the pieces that comprise Home of the Brave. I bring them up before the extended analyses of the pieces to suggest some meta-messages that Anderson uses to frame the film. The repeated phrases ask us to think about responsibility. We must determine who we are and what we want. The phrases also ask us to examine our actions in response to others’ priorities, e.g. “you pick up the pieces.” The visuals serve as a meta-message of the conflicts within language use: messages move too fast or are too illegible to be read; the lighted speaker is the “voice of authority.” We stand warned, or at least reminded, both visually and verbally, of the power struggles that occur in our culture and are played out in our language use.
Stories and pictures of bravery

All of Anderson’s work is, to some extent, about language and the effect of language. Kardon argues:

... in Anderson’s world we come, as in classic Pop Art, to the terror, banality, and awe of the capitalist Word. Anderson has monumentalized the Word by extending and shifting the time in which the Word appears, carefully bringing it into a structure that . . . exists episode by episode to exhibit chaos and discontinuity. (138)

I argue that Anderson’s problematization of bravery is exactly Kardon’s claim of “exhibiting chaos and discontinuity.” The film plays out many angles of Anderson’s and American culture’s notions of bravery: who is brave, who lives in the home of the brave, why bravery is significant.

The issue of play and its resultant humor is important to the film. Anderson plays with ideas, images, and cultural stereotypes in her work. It is hard to tell if she is dead serious or playing deadpan jokes. According to Levin, Anderson has made “the cutting edge of Conceptual art [into] entertainment” (187). Cummings calls Anderson a “tour guide, shaman, troubadour, babe-in-the-woods, prankster, and mater of ceremonies” (251). This ability to play with form and meaning results in Smagula’s comment:

Anderson represents a decidedly different, Postmodern sensibility in her work. She is an indication of a new drift in art—away from a hermetic Formalism and towards a body of work that mediates between easily understood, popular forms and meaningful
statements that question the very nature of contemporary life. Anderson feels she can be amusing, entertaining, and theatrically viable with no compromise in terms of the work's content, meaning, and effectiveness. (242)

Somewhere in Anderson's playful, unpredictable approach to her work is her commitment to exploring ranges of meanings. These ranges are Anderson's versions of problematizations.

I examine three different performances from Home of the Brave using their texts and contexts to discuss Anderson's problematization of bravery. These pieces are significant in expressing Anderson's ambivalence about bravery, and each piece incorporate the repeated narratives and visuals Anderson uses. For each separate performance, I provide discussion of the narratives (included in story form instead of stanza form) and visuals, then comment on the piece's context and its elucidation of Anderson's ongoing contextualization of bravery.

"Zero and One"

Description of the performance Anderson begins the movie with the phrases HOME OF THE BRAVE and A FILM BY LAURIE ANDERSON written large on the projection screen. She enters with an angular, jerky dance. The cast solemnly walks towards their spots. The short dance is spotlighted and makes her entrance a dramatic one. Anderson has on a white suit and a blank-face mask. The cast has masks on as well. The mask has drawn-on eyes, nose and mouth; it lacks any expression except a staring concentration. As the musicians
move to their places, Anderson plays the violin, which makes electronic
swooping noises. A mountain with cascades of images poured over it fills the
projection screen. An airplane flies backward, a TV falls from the sky, clouds
race by, and lightning bolts strike the mountain. At the end of her violin solo,
the stage goes black. The cast leaves. When the spotlight returns, Anderson is
there with her blank-face mask (her “Sharkey” mask). She delivers this
narrative in her “Voice of Authority,” which she uses in other pieces. Her Voice
is an altered microphone that, when she speaks, lowers her voice about two
octaves. Anderson begins the show:

Good evening. Now, I’m no mathematician but I’d like to talk
about just a couple of numbers that have really been bothering me
lately, and they are zero and one. Now first, let’s take a look at zero.
Now nobody wants to be a zero. To be a zero means to be a nothing,
a nobody, a has-been, a clod.

On the other hand, just about everybody wants to be number one.
To be number one means to be a winner, top of the heap, the acme.
And there seems to be a strange kind of national obsession with this
particular number.

Now, in my opinion, the problem with these numbers is that they
are just too close—leaves very little room for everybody else. Just
not enough range. So first, I think we should get rid of the value
judgments attached to these two numbers and to be a zero is no better, no worse, than to be number one. Because what we are actually looking at here are the building blocks of the Modern Computer Age.

Anything that can be expressed in words or numbers can be written in this simple, foolproof code. It's all here in a nutshell, the alphanumeric system, the A to Z, the zero to infinity of digital intelligence. (NB 135)

While Anderson tells this story, a zero and a one are projected behind her on the screen. The numbers waver on the screen, as if they might disappear at any moment. When Anderson is done with the story, she then goes on to describe several different zero-one combinations projected behind her. The first binary-string image is the first two letters of the first word of the Gettysburg Address. The next projection is the first two numbers, written in binary code, of her home phone number; quips Anderson, “the remaining digits are available on autographed limited-edition floppy disks on sale at the souvenir stand in the lobby.” Each image of the zero-one strings gets smaller and smaller, because each set of numbers gets larger and larger. Her last image of zero-one strings is huge. She notes that it is the first two notes of the song “Sharkey’s Day,” a song “I composed myself, using this very system. And it can be counted like this—and zero—and one—and zero—and one.” The zero and one continue to flash when
she stops counting. An eerie warning siren, one which would accompany a nuclear holocaust, accompanies the flashes. The stage goes black.

Narrative texts and analyses This first performance allows Anderson to introduce a repeated narrative phrase: home of the brave. Right away the audience is reminded of the name of the film and of the terrain to be explored. Even though we are not sure where the “home of the brave is,” though we know the phrase from the U.S. national anthem, we can tentatively assume it is the United States. The audience is thus set up for more information about Anderson’s United States, which she delivers throughout the rest of the film. We are also set for more explorations of the idea of bravery. Are the “zeros” the brave ones, because they’re not “ones”? Anderson never claims an answer, but she does indicate that both zeros and ones are special in their own right, precisely because of the power relationship between the numbers in her examples of binary code.

Anderson’s narrative establishes her as the star (the authority) of the film. The audience greets her opening “Good evening” with shouts, cheers, and applause. No one seems hesitant to grant Anderson the authority to tell her stories, and she does not disappoint her audience. Her text conveys little hesitation about her position, but it also points out unique ideas regarding zero and one. The extreme closeness of zero and one is not apparent in our society, but Anderson makes sure we understand the dichotomy our social meanings of “zero” and “one” present when compared with their numeric status. The
numbers take on additional meaning when Anderson points out their importance as the "building blocks of the Modern Computer Age." Anderson's first narrative accomplishes two things: it establishes her as the "code speaker" of the film, and it also introduces the audience to her ability to draw unnoticed and underappreciated relationships out of what seems to be a simple situation. Zero and one do not appear to be complicated numbers (or ideas)—at first glance. Anderson points out their complexity with practiced ease.

With this comparison of zero and one, Anderson introduces the audience to binary code, the most basic computer language available (it was even more so in 1985). This basic structural language serves as an example of simplicity within complexity; zero and one are simple within themselves, but the combinations of patterns they can make is infinite, and the combinations can represent almost anything. Anderson makes this binary code socially important by reminding us of our cultural stereotypes surrounding zero and one. The social gulf between the numbers is enormous, even though, as she points out, there's not much numerical room between them. With the introduction of the social implications of zero and one, they become metaphors for more than just the building blocks of "the Modern Computer Age." Zero and one become the building blocks of society. We are either one or the other—there seems to be no space between them. We may be both a zero and a one, though it seems difficult to "be" the numbers at the same time. Zero and one are the most basic computer language available. Zero and one are also the basic "language" of classification for individuals within our society. But this basic language is socially complicated.
Anderson’s Voice of Authority introduces us to a new vocal range. In her work Anderson uses voices to “escape her perspective,” and this particular voice offers her the chance to explore a male point of view:

... it’s also the voice of a shoe salesman or of a guy who’s trying to sell you an insurance policy you don’t want or need. He’s a bit insecure but cheerful, not very bright, but quite pompous anyway. It’s only recently that I realized that this guy is based on my first ideas of who men were. (NB 150)

Anderson’s Voice of Authority allows her to explore the “carefree species” that men appear to be, a Foucaultian power structure society has created for them. Their authority gives them the ability to express ideas without worrying about consequences. Men are “code speakers” whether or not they know or understand the code. Anderson’s “male” voice thus gives her more credibility and authority. What she says in this voice must be “true”.

**Visual texts and analyses** Several repeated visuals make their first appearance in this piece. The Sharkey mask is brought back several times in the film, though Anderson is not always the person wearing it. These masks provide the performers with an extra character to play; they can be their musician-selves or their blank-faced selves, and sometimes they are both at the same time. The mask indicates their ability to visually shift their personality: sometimes they are themselves, sometimes they are Sharkey. In this opening spot, they are only blank-faced selves who frame Anderson’s whirling, dancing
blank-faced self. Anderson’s physical motion is also part of this piece. Her angular dance begins the pattern for the “Sharkey dance,” which she and the crew members do in both “Sharkey’s Day” and “Sharkey’s Night.” The dance is slightly manic, relatively unpredictable, and suggests mechanical influences. Anderson’s arms and hands wave in patterns a robot might exhibit.

This idea of social complication within apparent simplicity is emphasized by Anderson’s mask. The mask is an almost-faceless face, but its rhetoric is strong. With its drawn-on features, its expressions are limited to the one it wears, but the face seems determined. The mask functions most clearly as an informative and persuasive visual. This mask visually emphasizes the singularity within the multitudes: Anderson, at this point, is a singular mask. Her singularity is a piece of information we need to remember. Later on, she is one among many. But even as a group, their faces indicate they are the same “person,” no matter how many of them there are. The mask persuades us to think of it (and those who wear it) as a character who seems separate from Anderson and her musicians. That characterization is extended first to Anderson, then to everyone who wears the mask. In their blank faces, they exhibit a kind of “groupthink” that becomes pervasive. We believe what the Sharkeys are saying and doing, especially when they are led by the Head Sharkey—Anderson herself.

Bravery in the context of cultural roles Anderson’s Voice of Authority, her mask, the projections of zeros and ones, and her narrative add up to a
meditation on the lack of distance between polarities. Bravery in this "home of the brave" might only be its opposite, which many people regard as stupidity. Often we say "well, I was brave, or maybe I was just stupid," indicating that what appears to be brave, considered action might only be unconsidered impulsiveness. In the same way, a "zero" and a "one" could be different sides of the same idea, with the "one" side of the dichotomy as the privileged one. Even though zero and one are numerically close, their social meanings are miles apart. Even though zero and one make up the most basic machine language we know, the combinations of numbers are infinite. What appears simple is truly complex. Or is it? Bravery seems to be a complex idea in the "home of the brave," but it's really only the courage to act, to declare oneself to be a "one" instead of a "zero."

Anderson problematizes zero and one by connecting them to two seemingly different systems—society and computer languages. Anderson demonstrates that the comparison isn't far-fetched. Both systems have prescriptive rules and established polarities that must be followed. Zeros aren't allowed to be ones, and vice versa. In computer code, you can move between the numbers, and switch them back and forth, but the code will not allow one to be the other. The order is set, as Anderson demonstrates. Specific patterns of zeros and ones will make specific things, such as her phone number. The system may not be disturbed.

In American culture, however, "zero" and "one" seem a bit more fluid, though people tend to be labeled one or the other. Anderson's Sharkey character
seems to be a zero; his face indicates he is expression-deficient, possibly bland and boring. However, Sharkey is a one, because he knows the secrets. He has the knowledge. He is "brave." He understands more than other people do, because he can see the comparisons between the strict binary of computer code and the strict hierarchy society levels on us. Even though we may think we can move between zero and one, Anderson suggests the rigidity of the social order with her comparison of American society and computer code.

This piece is most easily contextualized within the confines of the film. Sharkey's character appears and disappears during the two hour concert. His presence is slightly ominous, because we don't know who this blank-faced person is. As the film progresses, Sharkey becomes the embodiment of Anderson's "everyman". Sharkey speaks of cultural connections we make but do not articulate, for fear of sounding slightly insane. As we see more of his worldview, we discover that Sharkey is deep in the throes of Foucault's "liberation" of what may be madness. Foucault describes this liberation as a proliferation of meaning, from a self-multiplication of significance, weaving relationships so numerous, so intertwined, so rich, that they can no longer be deciphered except in the esoterism of knowledge. . . . Thus the image [or the word] is burdened with supplementary meanings, and forced to express them. And dreams, madness, the unreasonable can also slip into this excess of meaning. (MC 18-19)
Sharkey speaks aloud this “excess of meaning.” In Anderson’s/Sharkey’s narrative, she brings up many different connections. Sharkey mentions the close proximity of zero and one, which is “not enough range,” and how the social gap between the labels of “zero” and “one” constitutes a much larger span. This social edifice of numerical labels then shifts to become “the building blocks of the Modern Computer Age,” complete with giant projections of the “digital building blocks” of Sharkey’s home phone number projected on the screen. Sharkey explains, “Anything that can be expressed in words or numbers can be written in this simple, foolproof code. It’s all here in a nutshell, the alphanumeric system, the A to Z, the zero to infinity of digital intelligence” (NB 135). Sharkey has just given us license to explore our entire world in terms of zero/one combinations. We can choose our own path, or we can follow him. We have until “infinity” to discover all the combinations. In the same way, we have just been given license to explore Anderson’s notion of “home of the brave.” Are we “home” in this place? We are still left wondering who the “brave” are, and whether or not we are one of them. With her comments on the social structure of zero and one, Anderson points out the slipperiness of categories. We might be considered “brave” in one instance, but we are just a hair’s breadth away from “cowardly,” just as we can move between “zero” and “one.”

“Sharkey’s Day”/“Sharkey’s Night”

Description of the performance  The pieces “Sharkey’s Day” and “Sharkey’s Night” are separated in the film but represent two halves of a whole.
Anderson continues her Sharkey character's musings on life with these performances. As the pieces reveal, Sharkey seems to be sliding faster and faster into Foucault's "excess of meaning".

"Sharkey's Day" chronicles a morning in the life of Sharkey. The entire cast returns in Sharkey masks, as they are in the introduction of the film. Anderson does not wear a mask, so she is set apart from "the crowd". The performance, which is relatively long, is framed by a narrative of Sharkey's complicated thought processes. This narrative is delivered by Anderson, in her own voice:

Sun's coming up. Like a big bald head. Poking up over the grocery store. It's Sharkey's day. It's Sharkey's day today. Sharkey wakes up and Sharkey says: There was this man, and there was this road, and if only I could remember these dreams, I know they're trying to tell me ... something. Strange dreams. Oh yeah. And Sharkey says: I turn around, it's fear. I turn around again, it's love. Oh yeah. Strange dreams. And the little girls sing: oooeee Sharkey. And the manager says: Mr. Sharkey? He's not at his desk right now. Can I take a message? And the little girls sing: oooeee Sharkey. He's Mister Heartbreak.

And Sharkey says: All of nature talks to me. If I could just figure out what it was trying to tell me. Listen! Trees are swinging in the breeze. They're talking to me. Insects are rubbing their legs
together. They’re all talking. They’re talking to me. And short
animals—they’re bucking up on their hind legs. Talking. Talking
to me. Hey! Look out! Bugs are crawling up my legs! You know?
I’d rather see this on TV. Tones it down. And Sharkey says: I turn
around, it’s fear. I turn around again, it’s love. Nobody knows me.
Nobody knows my name.

And Sharkey says: All night long I think of those little planes up
there. Flying around. You can’t even see them. They’re specks!
And they’re full of tiny people. Going places. . . . That Sharkey!
He’s a slow dance on the edge of the lake. He’s a whole landscape
gone to seed. He’s gone wild! He’s screeching tires on an oil slick at
midnight on the road to Boston a long time ago. And Sharkey says:
Lights! Camera! Action! TIMBER! At the beginning of the movie,
you know they have to find each other. But they ride off in
opposite directions.

You know? They’re growing mechanical trees. They grow to their
full height. And then they chop themselves down. Sharkey says:
All of life comes from some strange lagoon. It rises up, it bucks up
to its full height from a boggy swamp on a foggy night. It creeps into
your house. It’s life! It’s life! . . . Deep in the heart of darkest
American. Home of the brave. Ha! Ha! Ha! You’ve already paid for this. Listen to my heart beat.

On top of old Smokey, all covered with snow. That’s where I’m gonna . . . that’s where I’m gonna . . . go. (dust jacket, Mr. Heartbreak album)

The stage is a frenzy of action in this performance. Everyone is dancing, including Anderson. The dance is mechanical and choppy, and is repeated in “Sharkey’s Night.” The projection screen at the back of the stage is alive with pixel-evident pictures of suns, faces, houses, and mountains. The mood seems to be joyous. Anderson tells Sharkey’s story in a tone of wonder, as if Sharkey is discovering the world for the first time. Sharkey’s imagination is evident. At the end of the performance, the Sharkey atmosphere seems to wind down with Anderson’s promise of “that’s where I’m gonna go.” The performers, and Anderson, have tired themselves out with the energy of Sharkey’s thought processes. “Sharkey’s Day” appears in the beginning half of the show.

By contrast, “Sharkey’s Night” holds a dark, sinister tone. It is the last piece performed in the film. The stage is much darker, and the images projected on the screen are ominous—for example, a line drawing of the “Sharkey” mask, with its eyes shut tight and its mouth frozen open in a scream. The ensemble wears Sharkey masks again and they play, sing, and dance with a frenzied intensity. Anderson wears no Sharkey mask. She tells the story of Sharkey’s
night, in her (Sharkey’s?) Voice of Authority. This night is much different than Sharkey’s day:

Sun’s going down like a big bald head. Disappearing behind the boulevard. It’s Sharkey’s night. It’s Sharkey’s night tonight. And the manager says: Sharkey? He’s not at his desk right now. Could I take a message? Hey Kemosabe! Long time no see. Hey sport—you connect the dots. You pick up the pieces.

Well, I drove down to big DC. And I walked into Room 1003. And there they were: the Big Boys. And they were talking Big B, Little O, Little M, Silent B. And they were saying, let’s teach those robots how to play hardball. Let’s teach those little fellas a little gratitude.

Hey! What’s that big noise from the sky? Sounds like thunder—nope. Sounds like the Fourth of July—nope. Wrong again. You know? It’s just those angels walking. They’re clomping around again. Wearing those big clumsy shoes we got for them.

Well, deep in the heart of darkest America. Home of the Brave. The heart! Heart. You’ve already paid for this. Listen to my heart—beat.

(Album sleeve, Home of the Brave)
Throughout the narrative of "Sharkey's Night", Adrian Belew plays screechy guitar solos, which is the most prominent musical sound. At the end of the number, when Anderson intones her warning about the "heart of darkest America," she draws out specific words to give her statements even more impact; they sound almost like threats. Electronic screams and yips punctuate her last lines:

Well deeeeeeep (yip) (yip) (yip) (yip)
in the haaaaart (yip) (yip) (yip) (yip)
of darrrkest (yip) (yip)
America (yip) (yip) (yip) (yip)
HOME of the Braaaaave
The heaaaart! (yip) (yip) (yip) (yip)
Heaaaart! (yip) (yip) (yip) (yip)
You’ve already paiiiid (yip) (yip)
for thissss.

(warning siren)

Listen to my heart

(warning siren)

BEAT.

(Nuclear disaster warning siren pulses)

The ending is thunderous. The sounds fill up the stage and the theatre. The enormity of the sound contributes to its threatening quality. From the narrative
to the ambient sounds around the narrative, the timbre of this piece is menacing. All of the auditory stimuli suggest danger.

The motion in the piece is almost as frenetic as the movement in “Sharkey’s Day.” While Belew plays his wailing guitar, the cast dances the choppy “Sharkey dance.” Some have oven mitts or wooden mittens on over their hands. The cast members with fingerless hands show up prominently in the “Sharkey dance”; their hands give them an even more robotic look. At one point, Anderson appears out in the audience, where the crowd enthusiastically cheers her presence. She dances through the aisles, talking to the audience. The sound man appears in the picture as he scrambles to get out of the cameraman’s viewfinder. At another point, William S. Burroughs slowly enters from the side of the stage. We know it is Burroughs because he has already appeared twice on stage in the suit he is wearing. This time he wears a Sharkey mask. With the stateliness of a dignitary, he and Anderson tango and twirl across the stage in a comely dance that contrasts sharply with the Sharkey dance. He then leaves slowly, in his dignified way. Anderson returns to her previous frenzied pace. She finishes the piece as Sharkey instead of genteel dance partner.

Through most of the piece, the projection screen shows the line drawing of the “Sharkey face,” but this time it has its eyes closed and its mouth open, in a silent scream. At various points, the bottom of the screen glows red. As Anderson speaks the last lines of the piece, she draws her bow across her violin to activate the nuclear disaster warning siren. At the same pace as the siren, a zero and one flash on the projection screen. The film ends with the same
simple/complicated binary code with which it began. At the end of the film, the spotlight is on her, maniacal look on her face, and the screen is lit only with the image of the number one. Then the stage goes black.

_Narrative texts and analyses_ Anderson’s Sharkey character has a chance to demonstrate his realities in these two pieces. Sharkey seems to be a victim of his thought processes. He is caught in his own flood of words. The narrative of “Sharkey’s Day” is all about the “strange dreams” he has, where mechanical trees chop themselves down and wild animals talk to him. In “Sharkey’s Night,” those strange dreams magnify into paranoid nightmares. Sharkey is trapped in the description of what he’s encountered in “Room 1003” in “big DC.” In both cases, his character seems powerless to get away from the scenes he describes. He seems to have lost his social filter, or any way of deciphering what is “real” or “imagined”. Sharkey is trapped in Foucault’s “excess of interpretation,” but he must explain himself and his amazing vision(s). His explanations make him sound like a schizophrenic who has forgotten his medication and is forced to listen to the voices in his head. Foucault claims that madness aligns itself with language: “Madness, in the classical sense, does not designate so much a specific change in the mind or in the body, as the existence, under the body’s alterations, under the oddity of conduct and conversation, of a delirious discourse” (MC 99). Sharkey seems to be speaking this delirious discourse in his descriptions of his day and night.
Sharkey's/Anderson's ponderings are smaller stories within this larger story of "discourse delirium." We do not know if Sharkey is a true madman or a carefully observant genius; he may be either, or both. "Sharkey's Day" is relatively optimistic in its exploration of the world. The verses tell of how things are made, how things work, how the world works together to create life. The narrative also speaks of Sharkey's interpersonal abilities. Sharkey can inspire fear and love in women as he becomes "Mr. Heartbreak." His emotional play with "little girls" seems playful but confused. As he is appealing to the "little girls" enough so they call him "Mr. Heartbreak," at the same time he and the women "ride off in opposite directions," even though "at the beginning of the movie they know they have to find each other." Sharkey's language seems to isolates him as well as make him popular.

His relationship stories are less important than his "strange dreams." The strangest is his decision to locate himself "deep in the heart of darkest America, home of the brave." Here we also have the repetition of "You've already paid for this/Listen to my heart beat." In these lines is a plea for acceptance—we've already "paid" for Sharkey's craziness, but we have yet to accept his point of view. His heart beats just like ours. All of us are stuck in "darkest America, home of the brave." Some of us are braver than others—Sharkey is brave because he can articulate his theories of mechanical trees.

"Sharkey's Night" is Sharkey's/Anderson's darker dreams. This piece describes a threat of (nuclear) war, a threat of a malevolent government, a threat of total distraction. Sharkey's imaginings are not without basis in 1985/86; the
Cold War still rages, and nuclear disarmament is not a reality. What Sharkey sees in “big DC” is a common paranoid vision of the government—a group of “Big Boys” sitting around, deciding the fate of the world, carefully ensconced “deep in the heart of darkest America.” In the “home of the brave,” our country is run by cowards who shield themselves in darkness and secrecy.

Despite Sharkey’s courage in articulating his “strange dreams,” he claims that “nobody knows me. Nobody knows my name.” As forward as he is about his opinions, he still perceives himself as a nobody. In this respect, his narrative relegates him to the voices Anderson claims to represent in her work. She notes that her performances and projects are the “various voices” she has used to speak for her (NB 7); these voices represent “English as spoken by Americans: the voices of machines, politicians, sitcom stars, nuns, and ouija boards” (NB 7). She argues that “I relate to . . . the No Bodies. I’ve written many songs and stories for these ‘people.’ They have no names, no histories. They’re ousted of time and place and they are the ones who truly speak for me” (NB 7). Sharkey represents one of Anderson’s No Bodies, even though he has a name and a job (“Paging Mr. Sharkey . . . Sharkey’s not at his desk right now; can I take a message?”). Anderson’s No Bodies are the ones who repeat, over and over again, “Deep in the heart of darkest America/home of the brave/you’ve already paid for this/listen to my heart beat.” The No Bodies, like Sharkey, want to be noticed. But they’re too “crazy” to be acceptable to our culture.

If we view Sharkey with a dispassionate eye, he certainly seems to be ill. In fact, Sharkey seems quite manic. Mania is one half of manic-depressive
illness, or bipolar disorder. Bipolar disorder is an imbalance of neurotransmitters in the brain, causing sight, sound, and language systems to become overactive and unpredictable. Mania is “talking on and on without making sense” (Gorman 178). Sharkey rambles on and on, becoming more threatened and delusional as the film progresses. Another symptom of bipolar disorder is delusions, in manic or depressed states, which are characterized as “a false belief that no amount of reality, facts, or hard evidence will shake” (Gorman 403). Delusions are their own reality, usually singular realities. Sharkey’s reality seems fairly individual to Sharkey, and his stories represent his unique perspective. Sharkey’s reality reflects Foucault’s theory that madness is “delirious discourse.”

**Visual texts and analyses** The visuals in “Sharkey’s Day” and “Sharkey’s Night” provide other textual examples of Sharkey’s/Anderson’s oppositional viewpoints. The Sharkey mask, worn by the cast in the Sharkey pieces and by Anderson in “Zero and One,” is deceptive: Sharkey seems to have a very expressionless face, but his narratives belie the idea of an expressionless personality. Sharkey’s big, fingerless hands that cast members wear in “Sharkey’s Night” are awkward; they prohibit much work, but they encourage clapping and hand-slapping on the floor. The physical representations of Sharkey are a study of the schizophrenia he seems to exhibit. The “Sharkey dance” is a high-energy physical exploration of physical and personal space. The dance is another reflection of Sharkey’s potentially unstable mental state. The cast in the Sharkey
masks do this dance in both “Sharkey’s Day” and “Sharkey’s Night,” though in “Sharkey’s Night” some cast members are hindered by their hand mitts. The angular, automatic movements in the Sharkey Dance indicate that Sharkey may be “going through the motions” or may be reduced to a robotic, mechanistic individual who has no control over his life. In “Sharkey’s Day,” the movements are a bit more energetic and humorous than they are in “Sharkey’s Night,” where an element of fear seems to propel the cast’s movements.

The lighting also contributes to Sharkey’s slightly paranoid visions. For “Sharkey’s Day,” the stage is bright. All the musicians are easily seen, and Anderson is not spotlighted until the end of the piece, when she wistfully claims “on top of Old Smokey, all covered with snow, that’s where I’m gonna go.” Sharkey’s Day is clearly an ensemble piece, and Sharkey’s/Anderson’s energy is radiated to the cast and reflected back from them. In “Sharkey’s Night,” the stage is shadowy. The performers seem to fade in and out of Sharkey’s/Anderson’s consciousness. When the stage is illuminated, it is lit by dim red light or by spotlights on Anderson. The red haze is threatening; it provides a scary energy for the piece, especially when it lights the bottom of the projection screen where the Sharkey face is drawn, eyes closed and mouth in a frightened O. When Anderson is spotlighted and the stage is almost dark, she is conveying Sharkey’s most delusional thoughts. According to the light and dark contrasts, the inquisitive maniacal musings exhibited in “Sharkey’s Day” disintegrate into paranoid delusions for “Sharkey’s Night.”
The projections on the screen provide another reflection of Sharkey’s mercurial thoughts. In “Sharkey’s Day,” the screen is full of images: the sun comes up over and over again, sometimes in orange. The line drawing of the mountain is continually deluged with cascades of planes, TVs, and lightning bolts. The images flow as freely as Sharkey’s thoughts; they reflect his “strange dreams” with no hint of malice. Confusion or disassociation may be the order of the day, but the narrative and its visuals do not seem threatening. By contrast, the one image on the projection screen for “Sharkey’s Night” is the Sharkey mask with its “scared face.” Sharkey’s changed face grabs our attention because it has changed so dramatically from his previously lackluster expression. Now this line-drawn face appears truly frightened. When we look at the Sharkey projection, we realize that we, too, should be a bit frightened by this visual text.

Political culture in the eighties  Sharkey’s paranoia reflects the political happenings of the eighties in the United States. When Anderson created these pieces, America was learning Reagan’s version of bravery. Ronald Reagan was a Hollywood actor who had many cowboy roles. Reagan was a conservative, and he captured the governorship of California in 1966, then the presidency of the United States in 1980. Reagan’s social revitalization in his “supply-side” economic policies promised to create a more robust atmosphere in the U.S. The country plunged into an era of glitz, glamour, and excess, hoping to make up for the recession in place at the beginning of Reagan’s presidency. By 1983, the
economic picture brightened, with lower inflation rates, rising production, and a slowly-falling jobless rate.

Reagan's contribution to "American bravery" came most distinctly in his military policies. Under Reagan the U.S. became involved in peacekeeping in Lebanon, Beirut (where the Marines sustained heavy casualties), and Granada, plus covert missions in Nicaragua. The long-awaited release of the American hostages in Iran began his presidency with the image of a mighty and powerful America, and Reagan intended to maintain that image. Reagan continued his military buildup through the defense industry, and the jobs and products from the defense industry created part of the imagined economic stability of the eighties. Reagan also supported the Strategic Defense Initiative, designed to stop Soviet missiles in space before they reached U.S. targets. Reagan's establishment of U.S. military bravery is part of what "Sharkey's Night" reflects.

"Sharkey's Night" was created in the early eighties, as Reagan was busy reminding the world that the United States was a mighty military force. Sharkey is also concerned with worldwide military involvement. It is Reagan's government who is in "big D.C.," talking about how to teach "those little devils a little gratitude." The "big B, little O, little M, silent B" is the ever-present nuclear bomb, the one Reagan mock-threatened to use at the beginning of a press conference early in his presidency, noting that he had just made a law that eliminated the USSR, and bombing would begin in five minutes. Reagan was bent on impressing the world with the bravery of the United States of America. Anderson is reacting to Reagan's version of bravery as a show of force.
Anderson's reaction to Reagan-esque culture is personified in Sharkey. Sharkey is brave in part because he has the strength to be crazy. Sharkey is not afraid to say what he thinks, and to see the sun as a "big bald head poking up over the grocery store." Sharkey's ability to express his individuality makes him brave. That individuality also allows Sharkey to react in the way he does against "the big boys" in D.C. who are considering how to use the bomb. These "big boys" are the arbiters of the strong-arm tactics involved in bravery. They live "deep in the heart of darkest America" in the "home of the brave," working in "room 1003" of the Pentagon or some other secret government building.

**Sharkey: madman, artist, or concerned citizen?** Sharkey exhibits several signs of mental illness. If he were a real man (or woman), someone would have sent him to a hospital and pumped him full of antipsychotic drugs. But Anderson herself—Sharkey's actual "voice" and personality—is never committed, nor is she considered crazy. Instead, she is allowed to let Sharkey represent the schizoid views of bravery she sees in America. Anderson is freed by Sharkey. She can speak bizarre narratives in the guise of Sharkey and his shaky reality. Anderson is allowed this liberty because artists (especially performance artists) can assume personae in their works. Sharkey represents Anderson's illustration of how slippery reality can be, and how we can have strong reactions to cultural forces we encounter. The logic in Sharkey's narratives tends toward the slippery. Sharkey's narratives and visuals are reactions to our culture's notions of "sanity" and of "bravery." Being insane is its
own version of bravery, and Sharkey's reaction to the pro-war rhetoric of American culture provides us with another form of bravery in our "home of the brave." Insane or not, Sharkey is Anderson's version of a concerned citizen, speaking out against the potential abuse of governmental power.

Despite his bravery in expressing his opinion, Sharkey may be intimidated by his delusions. In "Sharkey's Night," he hears "that big noise from the sky," which he thinks (or is told) "it's just those angels walking. They're clomping around again. Wearing those big clumsy shoes we got for them." The trees and animals that talk to Sharkey in "Sharkey's Day" seem much less threatening than the big angel noise. This delusion of "angels clomping around" may or may not be generated within Sharkey, thanks to the piece's investigation of nuclear war and the U.S. government's role in warlike activities. As I've mentioned, Anderson is reacting to Reagan's policies of militaristic world involvement with her work. Consequently, the threat of nuclear war emerges in several places in Home of the Brave. Sirens go off several times during the film, including ones that sound like nuclear attack warnings. At one point, Anderson stands in front of a projection of what appears to be a large radar tracking antenna, one that might be used to track incoming missiles or enemy satellites. Dressed in white, she spins in sync with the rotation of the antenna, arms outstretched like a dying Christ on the cross. "Sharkey's Night" is the most overt attention Anderson pays to the threat of nuclear destruction. In this song, we begin to question the "Home of the Brave" as a safe place to live, especially if our government in "room 1003" in "big DC" is telling citizens that the big noises
from the sky are angels in heavy shoes. Anderson's Sharkey character is brave or
crazy enough to articulate his fear of nuclear war and his distrust of the
government, in his hope that someone will tell him what lies "deep in the heart
of darkest America." In "Sharkey's Night," Anderson asks us to "listen to my
heart beat," and punctuates the sentence with another siren. The heartbeat of
America is a signal of destruction.

In 1986, when Home of the Brave was entering theatres, the Cold War
was de-escalating. In the mid-Eighties, nuclear proliferation was slow and a
gradual peace was evolving with the USSR. Anderson began her commentary
on war before Home of the Brave, however, with her first commercial hit single,
"O Superman," released in 1981 (NB 284). Her critique of war in Home of the
Brave fits with her earlier commentary, which continues through her recent
performances. In 1992, she devoted part of her tour of Stories From the Nerve
Bible to critiquing the Gulf War (NB 273). One of the pieces from that
performance is titled "War is the Highest Form of Modern Art," a phrase
borrowed from Futurist artist Tomas Marinetti (NB 272). "Sharkey's Night"
holds much fewer aspirations. It boasts no pretensions of considering war as an
art form. "Sharkey's Night" tells the story of a potentially frightened and
possibly crazy individual who isn't sure what his government is hiding. For
Sharkey/Anderson, the "language virus" the government has is obfuscation of
the truth about its nuclear involvement.

Sharkey's delusions harm no one, except maybe Sharkey. But they
provide a great deal of information for analysis. Anderson uses the Sharkey
persona to explore the ideas of paranoia, government conspiracy, and “abnormal” ideas of how life works. True to form, Anderson does not declare whether or not Sharkey is crazy, or whether she intended him to seem mentally ill. Audiences don’t know whether or not Anderson herself is quite sane. The issue of sanity isn’t important—the ideas provided by the “insanity” are. The concepts proposed in “Sharkey’s Day” and “Sharkey’s Night” are not average, ordinary ideas. However, they are thought-provoking and interesting concepts. Whether or not she or Sharkey is insane does not matter. Our heightened consciousness regarding the presentation of “American” bravery is what matters.

**Conclusions: the versions of bravery**

In this chapter I suggest that *Home of the Brave*, specifically “Zero and One,” “Sharkey’s Day,” and “Sharkey’s Night” serve as opportunities to problematize Anderson’s consideration of America as a home of various kinds of bravery. *Home of the Brave* is not a “stand-alone” problematization of American culture. No problematization stands alone, nor does any performance. To problematize is to enter the cultural “play of true and false” around an idea by uncovering and analyzing particular formations of that idea. No one angle will be true or false; all angles will be part of the discursive formations around a particular idea. Problematization is basic to thinking, as Foucault argues in Deleuze’s volume *Foucault*: “To think is to experience, to problematize” (in *PPC* xxiv). Anderson is thinking, experiencing, and
problematizing as she explores bravery in American culture. The final argument
I make here involves Anderson's privileged use of interpretation. Anderson is
free to problematize in almost any way she desires because she is a "code
speaker" of the "code" of art. She has the power to do as she chooses, because she
is part of the discursive structure of the cultural entity called art.

"Code speaking" and interpretation

Anderson's privileged position as "artist" allows her to be as
indeterminate as she chooses. She is a "code speaker" in the art world, and
artists are allowed to explore the cultural play of ideas, including the play of a
concept such as bravery. In her work, Anderson happily places the burden of
meanings on us, but she also provides us with many meanings to consider. Her
pieces are multidimensional and provide no answers. In some respects,
Anderson gives away control of her pieces by allowing them to hold many forms
of meaning. However, Anderson retains her position as "code speaker" by
providing some particular guidelines for interpretation. Even though Anderson
is trying to subvert the cultural code that holds sway, she is still a privileged
speaker. As an influential, popular artist, she is part of determining how the
cultural code of the U.S. is articulated.

Anderson is a recognized part of twentieth century performance art
history (Levin, McCorduck, Dery). As a performance artist, Anderson is not a
painter, sculptor, printmaker, or filmmaker, nor any other "typical" artist.
Performance artists paint with their bodies and stay on top of ladders for twenty-
four hours. According to Goldberg, "the history of performance art in the twentieth century is the history of a permissive, open-ended medium with endless variables, executed by artists impatient with the limitations of more established art forms, and determined to take their art directly to the public" (9). Though Anderson is not extreme or confrontational, as some performance artists are, her work is appropriate to performance art. Her open-ended performances with "endless variables" subtly work to subvert the cultural code she reads in American culture. *Home of the Brave* is part of the history of twentieth-century performance art. However, her inclusion in history and the popularity of her work provide her with the opportunity to become a "code speaker." The implication of that phrase is more than just the person who "speaks the code." It indicates Anderson's power level within the codes at hand. Anderson is extremely influential as an artist, and her influence crosses cultural lines; she is as popular with the technology geeks as she is with postmodern artist critics and performance art fans (McCorduck 80). Critic Ted Grossman calls Anderson "the grande dame of performance art" (1). At the same time, Mark Dery claims "Like Pee-Wee Herman, Ronald Reagan, and Michael Jackson, she is always in character; her onstage and offstage personae are virtually inseparable" (791). Anderson is a "code speaker" because she has attained power within the cultural structure of the art world.

Anderson uses at least two visual tactics in *Home of the Brave* to maintain her position as "code speaker." The spotlight and the idea of light/dark combinations are introduced in the beginning of the film, when Anderson
enters to perform "Zero and One." The spotlight adds visual emphasis to Anderson, because the spotlight marks her as "the one in charge" or "the one with the answers". At the very least, she is "the performer," and we listen to her for that reason. The appearance and disappearance of her Sharkey mask is also part of the visual representation of her power. For "Zero and One," she wears the mask, and she is singular. When she performs "Sharkey's Night," she does not wear a mask, and the cast does. She is marked differently, and she retains her position as "code speaker."

Anderson's status as a solo performer also reifies her as a "code speaker," because she allows little chance for others to disrupt her code. Anderson seems to work alone, no matter how many guests artists she incorporates into her performances. Her work may look like chaos, but it is all very carefully orchestrated. Home of the Brave is Anderson's largest collaboration, but it looks like a solo performance backed by an ensemble. The collaborative portion of it is less than it could be, for such a large group of performers. Of course, everyone is spotlighted at one time or another—for a brief moment. Always, however, Anderson is the focus.

Anderson has taken on the role of artist as social critic, and as such, she has incorporated Van Laar and Diepeveen's designation of artist as social critic: "alienated expatriate, a kind of prophet who stands outside society. . . . These artists create new visual languages in order to reject particular social and aesthetic conventions" (60-61). But the role of social critic is one we can all appropriate. It is different for Anderson because of her status as an artist.
Anderson's personal power and "code speaking" represent a different approach to what Foucault refers to as the relationship between power, truth, and the individual: "If I tell the truth about myself, as I am now doing, it is in part that I am constituted as a subject across a number of power relations which are exerted over me and which I exert over others" (PPC 39). Anderson's performances may try to make sense of the power relations that flow over us in our culture, but her role as "code speaker" gives her some control over these power relationships. She may be subject to the mercy of critics and the ticket purchases of audiences, but she also is part of the group who shapes the climate in which her work appears. Anderson has been part of the art establishment. She has won two grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (Howell 150), a government agency. She is not one of the "NEA Four," the performance artists who were denied grants because their work was too controversial (Ingalls B8): she is not chocolate-covered Karen Finley, or lesbian activist Holly Hughes. Her cool, careful approach to art is a Laurie Anderson hallmark. This cool calculation is part of why she is a "code speaker"—she only speaks against "the code" when it will benefit her.

Her position as "code speaker" undermines, to some extent, the posture she works to cultivate in *Home of the Brave*. Anderson works hard to disrupt the power our culture has over us, but at the same time she is unable to escape the fact that she controls that culture, at least in part. Her protracted career and her popularity have allowed her to say and do almost anything, without much reprisal. Despite the fact that *Home of the Brave* wasn't a commercial success, it
was a success in Anderson’s particular “code world.” Critic Tony Reveaux reviewed the film after viewing it in San Francisco, mentioning that “the film is unified by the astonishing charm of Anderson’s hi-tech visual expressionism” and “Anderson’s epigrammatic narratives were never so clearly conveyed as they are in the audio-visual unity of the film” (n.p.). Reveaux’s commentary praises Anderson’s work. If she produced pieces that weren’t appreciated or admired in the art world, she would have little status as a “code speaker.” However, that’s not the case. Anderson’s ability to engage in “code speaking” comes from the power she draws in the art world and in the flow of pop culture. Her success in the art world allows her to speak subversively, and pop culture loves her for turning upside down the rarefied airs of high culture. Anderson cannot lose. Her power is secure.

Final thoughts on American bravery

Anderson’s status as “artistic code speaker” diminishes her credibility to undermine power structures involved in that code, or any other code. However, Anderson’s performances still ask interesting questions about the nature of bravery as our culture conceived of it in the eighties. Her pieces suggest we cannot claim one meaning for bravery, despite Reagan’s attempt to make America “brave” with his aggressive stance on world peace. No matter what we believe, Anderson’s attempts to problematize bravery in Home of the Brave provides myriad ways to understand this particular national concept. Anderson
has followed Foucault’s request for exploring “the play of true and false.” Levin argues

reprocessing media information is what [Anderson’s] work is about: languages, sign systems, body language, and the conventionalized languages of cliché, jargon, and slang. Making simple connections that speak of lack of connection, she sets streams of consciousness to work in a game of associations and non sequiturs that short-circuits systems of communication. . . . (189)

*Home of the Brave* takes Foucault’s desire to uncover power relationships and casts our national ideas of bravery into the arena for consideration. Anderson’s notions of bravery seem to be non sequiturs, such as Sharkey’s delusions. But Sharkey’s delusions remain consistent in his desire to speak his mind. Sharkey is brave to speak against the Big Boys in Big D.C.

Various conclusions can be abstracted from the film: bravery is individual, bravery is a national obsession, our government pretends to be brave, only those who speak their minds are brave. The conclusions do not matter as much as the effort to unearth them. With *Home of the Brave*, within the art world and the performance world, Anderson has stimulated us to problematize, as she does, our understanding of cultural concepts such as bravery. We may not enjoy facing the realities Anderson offers us with her problematizations. Looking into the dark side of America’s government may not appeal to us. However, Anderson does not intend her work to be entirely appealing—Anderson is aiming for thought-provoking, instead. Critic Herbert
Blau claims that Anderson's performances provide us with a slightly scary view of life: "in the middle of the journey of life, the dark wood is entered and the straight way lost" (121). There is no "straight way" to American versions of bravery. The word offers too many contradictions, and Anderson points out some of those contradictions in *Home of the Brave*. 
CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR PERFORMANCE WITHIN CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Or perhaps, if we all remain attached to the old name [rhetoric], feeling that it gathers together a wide and exciting array of approaches to symbolic behavior as it has unfolded throughout human history (and continues to unfold), we must grant the term rhetoric the broadest meaning—a meaning that would encompass all inquiries into the use of symbols, with no suppositions as to the answers of our questions. Let us give up contending over the word, over who is in and who is out. Rather, let us see what our contending viewpoints together reveal about skilled human discourse. Then rhetoric will be ever new. (Bazerman 7, italics in original)

It is the thrill of the pull between someone else's authority and our own, between submission and independence that we must discover how to define ourselves. In the uncertainty of that struggle, we have a chance of finding the voice of our authority. Finding it, we can speak convincingly . . . at long last. (Sommers 31, her emphasis)

Keeping rhetoric "ever new" asks us, as communication scholars and English studies scholars, to expand our definitions of rhetoric and be willing to risk failure to gain greater insight. A study as intricate as mine risk much to test a small idea, namely combining concepts of text and context, energized by an audience, to form a concept of performance useful for analyzing artifacts. I offers
few new insights on rhetoric, but several suggestions for future research. I claim few discoveries, but have laid out a map for travelers. Geertz names the discovery/mapping challenge as “how to sound like a pilgrim and a cartographer at the same time” (Works and Lives 10), or how to continue discovering new territory without forgetting to track your course. In this chapter I provide the implications of the cartography drawn by the first four chapters. I provide my ideas for the next pilgrimage based on these “maps”—the suggestions for continued research drawn from the work done here. The maps I have drawn with this work should take us somewhere useful.

This chapter concludes my exploration of the performance equation I established in Chapter One. First I offer a specific implication for English studies from Chapter Four’s analysis Anderson. Next I explore some directions for future research based on my project. I conclude the chapter with another narrative appropriate to this manuscript.

Implications of Chapter Four

My study of Home of the Brave offers several implications. One I consider here that relates to Anderson’s exploration of bravery is her claim that “language is a virus.” In English studies, we are unable to “escape” the virus of language.

In medical terms, a virus is a clearly defined entity. It enters your body and tricks other cells into reproducing the viral structure. A virus does not leave your system. It may lie dormant, and you stay well. It may be active, and you
become sick. Once you contract it, you are never free from it. We contract the virus of language when we speak our first words as young children. We cannot be free of it: language is everywhere in our culture. We cannot rid ourselves of language, though we may try at times. Language comes in many forms, and its purpose is communication with each other. We need language(s) to communicate. Why, then, do they make us sick? Why do we have such trouble with language when it “gets away” from us and grows without bounds? Why do we have propaganda and hate speech? “Negative” forms of language flourish in the same way positive language systems do. We must be willing to accept the hate speech in order to facilitate the speech of peace.

In her short monologue in “Difficult Listening Hour,” Anderson/Sharkey muses that her relationship to the Soul Doctor who has broken into the house is a “guest/host relationship.” After examining Anderson’s pieces that most directly confront language use, I conclude that her view of language is similar to the guest/host symbiosis that exists for viruses. When a virus enters our body, we become its host, and it is our guest. If language is our viral guest, it may respond to us more charitably if we treat it with respect. Respecting a virus means keeping ourselves healthy, and trying to prevent the conditions that cause an outbreak of the virus. Respecting our language systems may indicate the same. But how do we keep ourselves “healthy” in relation to language? Anderson’s suggestion is embedded in her work: play with language, challenge it, and work to uncover as many nuances of a particular idea as is possible. Anderson does just that in her exploration of language as a virus. She
approaches zero and one as cultural status positions and as binary computer code. She allows her Sharkey character to revel in his language play and express his ideas, whether they are delusional or not. She overtly states that language is a shipwreck, a job, and a virus. Anderson never steps away from the idea of language as viral entity. Instead she mires herself in the possibilities that the idea generates.

If we “host” language, we become responsible for its safety and security. A good host takes care of her guest and make sure the guest’s needs are met, regardless of her (lack of) appreciation for the guest’s visit. We can apply this wisdom to the idea of hosting language within our human systems. For language, our host duties involve taking responsibility for how we mis/use language. We may decide not to contribute to hate speech; we may decide to give more compliments. Or we may decide to become more aware of the effects of language. The surface of language is slippery, changeable, and the top layer of meaning can slide away to expose its underbelly, where the power relationships lurk. The underbelly of language is where Anderson hosts her guests. Her performances remind us that language needs to be respected, cared for, and used wisely.

If, as language hosts, we are careless with language, we may make mistakes. We may assume that a pain cry is nothing more than a groan, and we may not offer help. We may assume people are ignoring us when they’re really asking us to pay attention. A guest may leave without warning if our hospitality isn’t sincere or adequate. We cannot get along without language. We can’t
afford to find out what would happen if we lost our language. But we can only be so careful. We cannot be responsible for the interpretations others attach to our language structures. We can be responsible for the way we construct our language use. We can offer evidence, support, and clear language to prove our position. We are responsible for the explicitness of our position. What happens after we create our position is not our responsibility.

As postmodern humans, we evoke language "diffusion, dissemination, pulsion, interplay, communication, interdependence, which all derive from the emergence of human beings as language animals, homo pictor or homo significans, gnostic creatures constituting themselves, and determinedly their universe, by symbols of their own making" (Hassan 93, italics in original). If we take this charge seriously—we make and live by our symbols—we can add to it Anderson’s charge—we die by our own symbols. Our linguistic structures are powerful creative and destructive entities. We must respect that power, as hosts to our guest of language.

**Directions for future research**

I offer directions for future research here as my suggestions for becoming both "pilgrim and cartographer." The two those areas of study covered below should respond well to my particular combination of performance, text, and context. Before I discuss areas of future research, I must sum up my argument for the importance of performance.
Performance theory in communication research

Performance is fundamental to humankind. Performances are as complex as religious rituals, as average as business lunches, or as intricate as childhood games. Performance never happens in a vacuum; performance is always for someone, whether for an audience of one thousand or of one (ourselves). Performance can overlap cultural categories: a play about AIDS represents an aesthetic event when it is performed on stage by actors using scripts and sets. However, the play's messages represent the cultural ideology of the playwright, the actors, and the producers. Communities can be split or unified by a performance’s political implications. Performances involve a complicated set of actions, individuals, and beliefs, no matter what kind of performance it is. All of these factors—audience, cultural purpose, message, political implications—provide evidence of the social nature of performance.

Throughout this work I have suggested performance as a cultural phenomenon—a site of cultural inquiry and cultural construction. Performance provides a space to work with or against a particular set of cultural constraints. The interpreter of the performance articulates (within the text/context interaction) assent or dissent in terms of those constraints. According to Kapferer, performance helps us understand larger cultural mysteries (such as religion) through individual, particular performances (such as prayer or communion) (190-191). Dis/agreement with the larger system is played out in the smaller action—the individual’s interpretation of the larger.
If we think of performance as a site for social debate, then the notion of argument can be incorporated into performance. The manager acts this way because she is arguing, with her performance, for a particular set of managerial techniques. The employee acts this way because she is performing against the boss's idea of management. Both manager and employee may thwart their overt performances with covert ones. A manager may ask for a set of employee work guidelines to be typed up for each employee, but may conduct herself in ways that directly contradict these guidelines. Though she has made overt gestures toward a particular point of view, her covert performance calls that point of view into question. The overt and covert incorporation of texts and contexts determine the impact of the performance on each interpreter (manager, employee, or outsider). Using the performance equation into our rhetorical analyses provides us with a tool to analyze situations where communication incongruities exist. We can study texts and contexts to interpret how the performances agree and differ. We can use the same analysis in situations where performances are consistent; we can study texts and contexts to determine why the performance is effective. Diamond points out that "culture complexly enunciates itself in performance, reiterates values, reaffirms community . . ." (6). Fusing the performance equation with rhetorical studies provides us with a unique way to understand how culture proclaims itself within performance contexts.

Problematization allows us to make choices about our text and context. Problematizing an issue such as nuclear war might yield the machinations it
takes to release a nuclear warhead, or how many nuclear protest groups exist in this country. These pieces of information add to the problematization of nuclear war by adding this information into the “play of true and false” around nuclear war. Then we interpret the information as we need to. If we, like Anderson, decide that it is still possible that a small group of men in a room somewhere has the ability to begin World War III as an act of revenge, we might create a performance like “Sharkey’s Night.” Problematization’s “play of true and false” allows us to pick and choose our information to construct our viewpoint.

Performance and professional communication

In their overview of *Professional Communication: The Social Perspective*, Blyler and Thralls ask two questions of professional communication scholars: “how can we begin to describe the different approaches within the social perspective . . . [and] how can we make sense of existing research and assess the directions that socially based studies in professional writing seem to be taking?” (5). These two questions allow for performance to enter the field of professional communication. The field is flexible enough to accommodate a new approach to social situations. Additionally, professional communication is large field, and the boundaries for what constitutes professional communication discourse have not been strictly drawn.22 This flexible approach and permeable boundary allow for new approaches to scholarship, including performance analysis.

My suggestions for research in professional communication using performative analysis arise from situations that seem to have a large component
of audience. Someone is there to listen to information presented by others, and that audience thus provides the interpretation that catalyzes texts and contexts into performances. Examples of such situations would be corporate shareholder meetings, office staff meetings, customer service phone calls, and performance reviews. Using the performance equation to analyze the personal interaction within texts and contexts inside the workplace allows us to enter those "business performances" into the larger interplay of performance considerations. We may discover new connections between staff meetings and church services, or motivational speeches and stage performances.

Thinking of professional communication interactions as performances can help generate better documents, speeches, and manuals for business and technical situations. Close study of the interaction of text and context, plus an awareness of audience needs, can help us more closely match texts or contexts to appropriate audiences. Careful analysis of text and interpretation can help to illuminate what contextual factors feature in the performance. Consideration of contexts and audience interpretation can help determine what information needs to be included in the texts of the performance. No matter which angles of the performance equation are highlighted, we stand to gain a deeper understanding of professional communication situations if we bring the performance equation into our interpretive strategies.
Performance in the classroom

A pedagogical situation provides obvious ties to performance, whether we study a one-on-one mentorship or a teacher lecturing to a class. Ask any teacher; she or he can articulate the "teacher role" they play in various teaching situations. Performance equation allow for different analysis of the teacher role, the student role, and how both interpreters interact within the text and context of the classroom. Interpreter perspectives would differ—is the teacher the audience for student-centered classrooms? Is the student always the audience for teacher knowledge?—and analysis of these various perspectives would be useful for understanding such topics as the creation of feminist classrooms, as told from both the student's and teacher's point of view. Textual necessities would differ from subject to subject. Contextual outlooks would vary with class size, location of classes, and reasons for gathering in an educational setting. Analyzing these combinations of text and context could provide us with better designed materials for teaching, or with better pedagogical techniques.

Performance has begun to move into the classroom. Two 1996 Text and Performance Quarterly articles interview Camille Paglia as a "performing artist-intellectual" (62). The second article was titled "'Improv is my pedagogical style': Camille Paglia on Teaching as Performance Art" (161). Paglia's pedagogical style arose from her admiration of great comedians and her great dislike of famous intellectuals who read to their audience. She argues that teaching is closer to improvisation:
People say to me, "Well, not everybody can do improv." And I say, "Well, what else is teaching but improv?" I say, "What kind of fucking stupid teaching is this—pardon my language—where you have these Shakespeare courses at Harvard, with 800 people sitting there and somebody comes out and reads a lecture that they've read every year for the past decade? Is that teaching? That's not teaching, that's wasting everybody's time. Teaching is improv!"

(162, emphasis in original)

Paglia views the classroom as organic: "the classroom is a living, breathing entity. The mood of the students—like the mood of a crowd—is part of what a teacher must take into consideration in a presentation. That's my philosophy" (163). In Paglia's eyes, the teacher/performer is "on stage" each time they enter the classroom. If their audience "heckles" them, they must change their material, as performers do. Phelan takes the performance-in-class analogy another direction, arguing that "The pedagogical class, like any performance event, is a collaboration. Each person is a part of the group and each a part from it. Collectively the class creates 'a piece'" (173). Phelan indicates another angle for performative research in the classroom—the "piece" the class creates as a performative unit. Herndl adds a Foucaultian twist to the idea of performance in the classroom. Herndl argues: "we must recognize that discourse is inseparable from institutions, from organizational structures, from disciplinary and professional knowledge claims and interests, and from the day-to-day interaction of workers" (353). Herndl indicates that writing teachers have their
own knowledge claims and represent Foucault's "code speakers" as much as anyone else. Herndl goes on to argue that "we have to face the fact that in teaching discourse we are unavoidably engaged in the production of professional and cultural power" (354). In essence, Herndl asks for the acknowledgment of our power relations—teacher/student, student/student, teacher/discipline—in the classroom. Using performance theory can help us unlock the power relationships present in the classroom.

Not every teacher approaches their classroom with the performance backgrounds of Paglia or Phelan. However, most teachers and students are well aware of their "performances" within the classroom. A performance analysis of pedagogical issues such as agency (who does/does not have it), intimidation (who is/isn't doing it), and learning effectiveness (what indicates it). These issues can be seen and articulated through classroom performances. We simply need to access those performances through explicating a classroom's text/context relationships in relation to a particular interpreter. Few of us offer the extraordinary performances of Paglia: "she is an endlessly self-referential dramatist, indeed a breast-beating melodramatist, histrionically ringing down the curtain on staid English department textualists" (Rodden 62). Even more subdued teaching performances can benefit from performative analysis.
Final notes

In the preface to his *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, Kennedy notes that the audience for his volume “is primarily made up of English-speaking students and nonspecialists in the classics who are interested in discourse in a variety of ways…” (xi). Kennedy mentions nothing about discipline, or who can and cannot read his book. I intend my dissertation to be another small example of a text available for students “interested in discourse in a variety of ways.” My project crosses many disciplinary boundaries, explores many theoretical areas, and makes several rhetorical leaps. I have accomplished what I set out to do with this dissertation, namely conceive a manuscript that uses tenets from speech communication, rhetoric, and professional communication, with a little art, anthropology, and cultural studies thrown in for good measure. If rhetoric is “the human effort to induce cooperation through the use of symbols,” (Brock et. al. 14), rhetorical studies should be open to all students interested in the communicative cooperation that results from the combination of these symbols. The study of human communication is a task for many different scholars in many different fields. No matter who does the examination of the artifact, or who takes the theory and applies it elsewhere, the task remains the same: the study of communication. That task crosses all boundaries.

I include one more story/performance to end this chapter, as I ended Chapter One. The performances I detail in these narratives (an Anderson concert and a David Byrne concert) are significant to this project for three
reasons. On a performance-as-aesthetic-event level, the work in them is of the greatest caliber—artistic, captivating, and thought-provoking. Spending a Saturday night with Laurie Anderson or David Byrne is a worthy investment in a cultural event. On an academic level, these performances are drenched with the interplay of texts and contexts plus the problematization of cultural constructs. Anderson's and Byrne's performances are perfect candidates for studies such as this one. On a personal level, these performances free me to do more artistic, creative work, both inside and outside academe. Performance is everywhere, and I participate with curiosity.

August 1997

I haven't seen David Byrne since 1989. When I heard David Byrne was coming to Minneapolis, I immediately called Joel. We knew we'd have to go together—both of our spouses would hate this show. But it's not a hardship, because we enjoy being together, especially in the pursuit of interesting concert experiences. We come to David Byrne as friends united in funky avant-garde aesthetic sensibilities. First Anderson, now this. Who could ask for more?

The opening band is great, and Joel and I agree we need to buy their CD, maybe before we buy David Byrne's. They're from New Orleans, and they layer the classic Dixieland jazz with funky horns and hip-hop, of all things. You wouldn't think it works, but it does. They play a 45-minute set, and my analytic mind begins to whir about ten minutes into the show. Who is performing here
(Cool Bone)? Who are they (eight younger black men)? What is their text (stories about the lives and relationships of black men, told in rap/hip-hop rhyme)? What are they problematizing (black men and black culture)? What are the historical and cultural roots of their music? Why did David Byrne choose them for his opening act? As I enjoy the music, I think about all these questions, and I realize I’m not relaxing quite as much as I had planned. Stop thinking, I tell myself. But the performance nuances I have been working out in my dissertation keep weaving themselves in and out of their big brass sound.

When they leave the stage, I turn to Joel and say “Guess what I’m doing.” He asks “What?” and laughs when I tell him I’m writing my conclusion in my head. He tells me to quit it and shakes his head in amusement. Joel is smart; he plans on completing a master’s degree, and stopping.

After some equipment and set changes, the lights dim again. The crowd begins to cheer, most of them on their feet. We’re in the balcony, so we can see the floor wavering, a field of bodies swaying in anticipation. The musicians come on stage, and finally David Byrne emerges in a hot pink fringe-fur suit, with a lime green shirt. He looks like a Muppet on crack, but it fazes no one. His looks are part of the craziness. We all know he’s a genius. He begins with one of the most popular Talking Heads songs:

And you may find yourself living in a shotgun shack.
And you may find yourself in another part of the world.
And you may find yourself behind the wheel of a large automobile.
And you may find yourself in a beautiful house,
with a beautiful wife. And you may ask yourself,

“Well . . . how did I get here?”

And you may ask yourself, “What is that beautiful house?”

And you may ask yourself, “Where does that highway go to?”

And you may ask yourself, “Am I right? Am I wrong?”

And you may ask yourself, “MY GOD! WHAT HAVE I DONE?”

(What the Songs Look Like 27)

It’s the song I heard on the way to the concert. It seems appropriate: what have I done to myself, thinking I can finish a dissertation? Am I right? Am I wrong?

It’s one of my all-time favorite Talking Heads songs.

He segues into “Making Flippy-Floppy,” and the crowd keeps cheering, dancing, clapping. The energy in this theatre is enormous, as is the sound. He has a female vocalist, who looks like a throwback from 1968, a bass player who looks like he’s straight from a Jamaican beach, a keyboard and steel pedal guitar player who looks like a washing machine repairman, and a kind of “webmaster” of the stage who looks like a computer geek, who seems to be running the show with a PowerBook. For five people, they make a lot of music. Their energy matches the energy of all of us who are dancing. David Byrne looks like popcorn, bouncing all over the stage. He’s 45, and he has the energy of an eighteen-year-old gymnast. He looks like energy—he’s skinny, with no fat on him. He’s crazed. He stops bounding around to do some of his signature “jerk dancing,” and becomes a possessed marionette. No one shuts up, no one sits down. It’s too much fun. Joining in is imperative.
My mind begins, again, to think about what he’s doing on an analytical level. I dance, listen to the music, and think. What are his texts (old Talking Heads songs, for now)? What is his context (this ornate theatre with millions of gilt angels, his history as an avant-garde musician, my personal ties to his work, that Muppet suit I’m sure his costume-designer spouse made)? What am I doing?!?!?!?!? I tell my brain to relax and be quiet—or at least try. I have to get out of dissertation mode, at least for a couple of hours. David Byrne’s performance is for another project.

But I keep thinking.
NOTES

1 For more on the negotiation of communication, see the work of paralogic hermeneutists.
Paralogic hermeneutics argues that we negotiate communication from moment to moment, and these
negotiations form our communication activity. Rhetorician Thomas Kent and philosopher Donald
Davidson have done most of the work in paralogic hermeneutics.

2 Maclean’s book Narrative as Performance: The Baudelarian Experiment (1988, Routledge) is an
excellent study of how narratives are integral in performance. She uses the work of Barthes,
Balzac, Marin, LaFontaine, and Baudelaire to explore the relationships within narrative
performances. Because this work is outside of the scope of this dissertation, I have not relied
heavily on Maclean.

3 The “interpretive turn” allows us to examine communication within our own biases, points of view,
and ideologies. Geertz and other interpretive anthropologists are at the forefront of this school of
thought. The “interpretive turn” has been adopted, with success, in composition and rhetoric.

4 Stern and Henderson consider four elements as integral to a performance: text, context, performer,
and audience.

5 For a thorough discussion of performance, ritual, theatre, and the importance of performance to
humans’ lives, see Turner’s germinal volume From Ritual To Theatre: The Human Seriousness of
Play.

6 For a thorough discussion of dissoi logoi, see Susan Jarratt’s book Rereading the Sophists.

7 Part of Plato’s problem with the Sophists, in general, was their apparent reliance on style for
their eloquence. The charge of “style without substance” is one of the main arguments against
sophistic rhetoric. For a dry treatment of the topic, see George A. Kennedy’s chapter on the
Sophists in his Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern
Times.

8 See Richard Leo Enos’s volume Greek Rhetoric Before Aristotle for a differing viewpoint on
individual and community involvement in the sophistic tradition. Enos also addresses the
diversity within the sophistic tradition.

9 For another discussion of narrative and classical rhetoric, see Douglas Hesse’s article “Aristotle’s
Poetics and Rhetoric: Narrative as Rhetoric’s Fourth Mode.”

10 Narrative theory has emerged in psychology, sociology, organizational communication,
professional communication, political science, anthropology, history, and pedagogy. For excellent
examples of narrative scholarship, see articles and books by Nancy Blyler, Jerome Bruner, Edward
Bruner, Dennis Mumby, and Hayden C. White. Many of these authors have been cited here, but
each has several works devoted to narrative.

11 These requirements for informative visuals (plus others) are detailed in Tufte’s first book, The
For more discussion of the aesthetic attitude, see other aestheticians like Monroe Beardsley, George Dickie, or Vincent Tomes. The distant, aesthetic attitude towards art is not often employed in contemporary discussions of art.

See Gui Bonsiepe's article "Visual/Verbal Rhetoric," published in *Ulm* 14-16 (1965): 23-40, for further discussion of Bonsiepe's position on visual rhetoric. This article is difficult to find because *Ulm* is a German publication; the article is written in German and English.

For a discussion of the "preparedness" of communication interactions, see the works of Tom Kent or other paralogic hermeneuticians. The tenets of paralogic hermeneutics could have a large bearing on the argument for or against performative rhetoric; however, including that argument here would dilute the topic at hand.

For a thorough, easy to read discussion of Foucault's impact on communication studies, see Foss, Foss, and Trapp's chapter devoted to Foucault in *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, second edition. The authors provide a comprehensive look at Foucault's theories and his emergence in rhetorical studies.

Foucault's volume *The Archaeology of Language* provides an extensive discussion of Foucault's theories of discourse.

For an up-to-date analysis of the regulatory/transformatory power of Foucault's theories of sexuality, see David Halperin's book *Saint Foucault*.

Problematization provides a larger discussion of a topic, such as sexuality. Problematization allows us to explore cultural institutions and ideas tied to sexuality; is not a set of activities or a method of study. Deconstruction, for example, gives scholars a chance to carefully and thoroughly dissect a particular term that might come from the problematization of sexuality, such as *heterosexuality*. Deconstruction is more distinctly a method of inquiry, where problematization is a point of departure for inquiry rather than a particular set of terms or actions.

Clifford Geertz provides a discussion of art as cultural communication in his essay "Art as a Cultural System," included in *Local Knowledge*.

A thorough history of conceptual art or performance art is not integral to this study because I am not situating Anderson within those traditions. Instead, I situate her within performance studies, which has been covered in Chapter Two.

Though Anderson does not seem to intend Sharkey to be "crazy," her Sharkey character exhibits the tendencies of schizophrenia as described by physician Jack M. Gorman. According to Gorman, "the hallmarks of schizophrenia are hallucinations, delusions, thought disorder, and abnormal affect [mood]" (202). Rather than claiming Sharkey as an escaped mental patient, Sharkey seems to indicate, instead, that someone who would be assigned a diagnosis of schizophrenia (or another mental illness) has some useful political and social insight.

For research in the field of professional communication, see Blyler and Thralls' volume, Odell and Goswami's *Writing in Non-Academic Settings* (1985), and articles from the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*. As a field, professional communication is constantly evolving. The scholarship of individuals such as Blyler, Thralls, Odell, Goswami, Mary M. Lay, Ann Hill Duin, Kitty Locker, Richard Freed, Charles Kostelnick, Rebecca Burnett, Phillipa Benson, Ben Barton, Marthalee Barton, and Elizabeth Tebeaux make the field constantly new.
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I celebrate myself, and sing myself
And what I shall assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

"Song of Myself," Walt Whitman

This document was created with the generous assistance of the individuals listed here. All of them take Whitman’s words to heart.

To my Grover, to Daniel, to the one who listens, talks, reassures, and does more for me than I can ever write down. Thank you. I love you.

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