

Performance, Performance Studies, and a Performance Hermeneutic

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(Note: The following paper is derived from sections related to performance in the author's dissertation: *Performance, Religious Imagination and the Play of the Land in the Study of Deep Ecology and Its Practices*)

1. Performance

In their review of the state of Interpretation and Performance Studies, Mary S. Strine, Beverly Whitaker Long and Mary Frances HopKins (sic) refer to the essential contestation of performance:

Scholars in interpretation and performance studies value performance as process, activity, achievement, and as an object of study. Although they place performance in a valorized category, they recognize and expect disagreement not only about the qualities that make a performance “good” or “bad” in certain contexts, but also about what activities and behaviors appropriately constitute performance and not something else.¹

Strine, Long and HopKins point out that as an essentially contested concept, performance engenders healthy disagreements, which energize the scholarly endeavor. Through the contesting of ideas and positions, clearer articulation of positions is possible, leading to a richer understanding of performance.² In order to add to this contesting and articulation, I will derive my own working definition of performance, which will serve the purposes of this paper. In deriving a definition of any word, it never hurts to begin with the basics: the dictionary. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*³ gives the following definition of the word “perform:”

Perform: *v. - tr.* **1.** To begin and carry through to completion; do: *perform an appendectomy.* **2.** To take action in accordance with the requirements of; fulfill (a promise or duty, for example). **3.a.** To enact (a feat or role) before an audience. **b.** to give a public presentation of. *-intr.* **1.** To carry on; function. **2.** To fulfill an obligation or requirement; accomplish something as promised or expected. **3.** To portray a role or demonstrate some skill before an audience. **4.** To present a dramatic or musical work or other entertainment before an audience. [Middle English *performen*, from Norman French *parformer*, variant of Old French *parfornir*: *par-* (intensifier), from Latin *per-* + *fornir*, FURNISH.]

¹ Mary S. Strine, Beverly Whitaker Long, and Mary Frances HopKins, “Research in Interpretation and Performance Studies: Trends, Issues, Priorities,” in Gerald M. Phillips, and Julia T. Wood, eds. *Speech Communication: Essays to Commemorate the 75th Anniversary of The Speech Communication Association* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), p. 183.

² *Ibid.*

³ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, (1969), s.v. “perform.”

A quick check of "furnish" reveals that the Common Romance *fornir* means "to supply." Thus, the primary meaning of perform has to do with doing or accomplishing something, with taking action, perhaps in front of an audience. The derivation from the Common Romance *fornir* ("to supply") plus the intensifier *per* suggests that to perform means to supply a thing with what it needs either to be that thing or to be completed. There is a subtle sense here that to perform means to move a thing from inchoate potentiality to expressed actuality (the word "expressed" itself means "to press out or through.") So, in a sense to perform means to do something which supplies a thing with what it requires in order to be actualized or realized. When this is applied to either a task or a dramatic script, the validity of this definition becomes obvious. A task remains simply an idea or a word on a list until it is acted upon. A play script remains simply a jumble of words on a page until it is acted out. And each of these requires a human being to do the acting – what is required is human agency.

Performance, then, is ultimately about human agency. But it is human agency, which is applied to specific tasks or deeds in order to bring them about, to realize them. And, of course, by referring to human agency, it is referring to the engaged presence of the human body. The human body is integral to performance. In this paper, then, the word "perform" and its various cognates ("performance," "performative") will refer to *embodied human agency which brings into reality the potentiality of a given thing*.

2. Performance Studies

Performance Studies has developed out of the collaborative work of people in professional endeavors as diverse as anthropology, dance, acting, indigenous religious practitioners, theater criticism, cultural criticism, feminist aesthetics, speech communication, and folklore (to name a representative sample), who attempt to study the phenomena of performance.

In drawing upon Gallie's idea of an *essentially contested concept*, it is possible to view Performance Studies as the field of contest between amiable factions. Or perhaps field of play is a better allusion. As in any contest or game of play, it is possible to focus either upon the players involved individually or upon the field of play. When speaking of the players, i.e., the people from varying scholarly disciplines, the description looks more like cross-disciplinary work. That is, Performance Studies looks like people from different academic positions talking to one another, working on a common task or addressing a common problem. If one looks at the field of play itself, that is, the conversations occurring *between* people and the exchange of ideas, knowledge and points of view, then Performance Studies looks more interdisciplinary. In this view, Performance Studies dwells in the *inter* areas, the spaces between persons and disciplines.⁴

There are two main streams, which characterize the field of play of Performance Studies at the time of this writing: Performance Studies as pedagogy and Performance Studies as an aesthetic and phenomenological study of certain human behaviors. Naturally, such a bipartite categorization is an artificial and academic distinction, which in itself is instructive for our discussion. In actuality, there is vast overlap and interweaving between these two streams.

⁴ Craig S. Strobel, "Performance Studies: Is it Real?" Unpublished paper, p. 4. Also found online at <http://members.aol.com/StrobelCS/perfreal.htm>

2.1. Performance Studies as Pedagogy: Ronald Pelias as Example

In his book, *Performance Studies: The Interpretation of Aesthetic Texts*, Ronald Pelias defines his understanding of Performance Studies as "the process of dialogic engagement with one's own and others' aesthetic communication through the means of performance."⁵ The main thrust of Pelias' use of Performance Studies is essentially pedagogical and hermeneutical: as a means for studying and learning, and finally as a means for interpreting and understanding.

Performance offers an experience, an encounter with another sensibility. Experience allows for learning, for new knowledge. Accordingly, performance can function as a mode of inquiry, a method for understanding the aesthetic communication of others. Thus, performance becomes an experiential, investigative tool facilitating comprehension. The performer's primary concern lies with using performance as a way of knowing rather than as an artifact or product. The performer pursues performance work in order to make experience intelligible.⁶

Being from the stream of Oral Interpretation, Pelias' focus is upon the interpretation and understanding of texts, in whatever form they may be found.⁷ This textual bias stems from the development of literate cultures in the West, which led to a split between the written work and the performance of that written work.⁸ Recent theories in culture, post-structuralism (in literary theory especially), anthropology, and communication studies have muddied the distinctions between text and performance, and the expansion of Oral Interpretation/Speech Communication into the field of Performance Studies represents this muddying. Thus, while focusing upon performance as a means to study and understand the aesthetic utterances (texts) of others, the possibility remains also to study the various performances and performative behaviors of persons and cultures as well. In fact, there is reciprocity between using performance as a means for understanding and the study of performance itself: as one engages in the act of performance, one becomes aware of one's shifts in perception and relationships with others. One questions the nature and purpose of performance in this process. This leads to the study of performative behaviors in everyday life and performances in general.

2.2. Performance Studies as Aesthetic and Phenomenological Study: Richard Schechner and Colleagues

The other stream of Performance Studies is represented by the work of Richard Schechner and his colleagues at Tisch School of the Arts at NYU in New York City. This approach focuses upon the act of performance itself, and is influenced by the study of theater and anthropology as well as feminist and cultural criticism. Schechner has taught the-

⁵ Ronald J. Pelias. *Performance Studies: The Interpretation of Aesthetic Texts*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

⁷ Strine, Long and HopKins ("Research in Interpretation and Performance Studies," p. 184) cite the post-structuralist work of Roland Barthes as shedding light on the weaving together of many possible meanings and significations in a text (note the relationship of *Text* with *Textile*). Thus, a text may also be oral, or cultural in the sense of ethos or mythos.

⁸ Pelias, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-30.

ater at Tulane University and Tisch School of the Arts, and from 1967 to 1980 was the artistic director of The Performance Group in New York City. At the time Schechner published his first edition of *Essays on Performance Theory*,⁹ he was approached by Victor Turner to participate in the 1977 Burg Wartenstein Symposium No. 76 on “Cultural Frames and Reflections, Ritual, Drama and Spectacle.” This began a series of collaborations between Schechner and people such as Victor and Edith Turner, Barbara Myerhoff, Erving Goffman, and others. In 1981 and 1982 a series of conferences on ritual and theater were held. The conferences were designed to explore the role of performance and ritual in the expression of culture, and how the sharing of performance experiences across cultures might lead to increased respect for and enjoyment of one another’s cultures.¹⁰ Schechner’s own research into the phenomena of performance has led him around the world¹¹ to observe the drama, rituals, and other performances of a wide variety of cultures. In addition, his own theoretical essays have referred heavily to anthropological descriptions of rituals, festivals and other activities of cultures worldwide.

Schechner’s methodology features two aspects of the field of play analogy made earlier in this chapter. The first aspect is reflected in the diversity of persons gathered at conferences to explore the nature of performance: scholars, performers, choreographers and directors from across the world.¹² An interdisciplinary character emerged from the conversations and sharing of performance work in these conferences. The intellectual goal of the conferences:

was to approach the genres of theatre, dance, music, sports, and ritual as a single, coherent group, *as performance*. The underlying question became whether or not the same methodological tools and approaches could be used to understand a noh drama, a football game, a Yaqui deer dance, a Broadway musical, a Roman Catholic Mass, and Umbanda curing ritual, a Yoruba masked dance, and a postmodern experimental performance?¹³

This approach is clearly eclectic in its choice and gathering of individual “players.” Papers were presented at the conferences in addition to witnessing various performances, rituals and worship services. Many of the papers were revised based upon conversations between participants and published in later books. This reflects the *inter* nature of Schechner’s work, the role of the playing field and the development of performance theory out of the conversations between diverse disciplines and trainings.

In a pre-publication copy of a forthcoming textbook on Performance Studies, Schechner expounds in greater detail about the qualities of and reasons for Performance Studies:

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus (535-475 BCE) asserted that “You never step in the same river twice.” Heraclitus believed that the whole material

⁹ Richard Schechner, *Essays in Performance Theory, 1970-76*, (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977).

¹⁰ Richard Schechner and Willa Appel, *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 1.

¹¹ Richard Schechner, *Performative Circumstances: From the Avant Garde to Ramlila*, (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1983); *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*, (London, New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹² Schechner and Appel, *op cit.*, pp. 2-7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.3.

world was in continuous flux, that there was no ultimate reality except change. Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle asserts something similar. Performance studies - as an “approach” or a “discipline” or “field” - is a response to this kind of uncertain, always-in-flux, radically relativistic world. In a world of continuous change and uncertainty, performance studies asserts that examining a broad range of events, behaviors, and phenomena “as performance” offers a way of understanding. Performance studies deals with the broad range or spectrum of performances, from art to popular entertainments, sports to the presentations of self in everyday life, from religious ritual to state ceremony, from staged dramas to social dramas, the highly charged conflicts that mark political and economic life. As I've noted, all of these are performances, all of them, and more, can be studied as performances.

Performance studies, like every academic discipline, is founded on principles encoded in key terms such as “restored behavior,” “presentation of self,” “ritual,” “social drama,” “expressive culture,” and others. Working from a very broad definition of what is or can be studied as performance is not a denial or rejection of the aesthetics of theatre, dance, or the other performing arts. Nor is it a simple extension or projection of art aesthetics into social and religious life. It is to argue that there is more to performance than the artistic; that it is important to develop and articulate theories concerning how performances are generated, transmitted, received, and evaluated; that these systems of transformations vary from culture to culture and epoch to epoch. In pursuit of these goals, performance studies is insistently intercultural, inter-generic, and inter-disciplinary.¹⁴

The collaboration of Schechner with anthropologists such as Victor Turner is no accident. Several anthropologists in the second half of the twentieth century had begun to argue for the development of theories that took into account the role, and practice of performative acts, rituals and performances in human cultures. Lawrence E. Sullivan summarizes the genesis of performance theory from the standpoint of the anthropological team of players, and from his description, a list of the “usual suspects” emerges:

Where did this swell of interest first arise? Different theorists reckon their descent in diverse ways. Igor Kopytoff, studying African performances, once attributed the origins to Arnold Van Gennep's “classic formulation that people celebrate their passage from one state of being to another with symbolic performances.” Stanley Tambiah, in his analysis of theories of performance for the British Academy in 1979, credited the origins of performance theory to Radcliffe-Brown's acknowledgment of the complexities of dance among the Andaman Islanders. John Miles Foley, specialist in the study of Bulgarian epic, attributes the beginnings of Albert Lord's demonstration in 1958 that performance is the key creative act for the oral poet. Victor Turner, in the account provided in his book *From Ritual to Theatre*, reckoned descent from

¹⁴ Richard Schechner, “Chapter 1,” *Performance Studies Textbook* 2nd Draft. Unpublished manuscript. July 1995, found online at <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/schechner>, March 8, 1997.

Dilthey’s claim that the data of experience, *Erlebnis*, take on a manifest form of expression in the human act. Adrienne Kaeppler, anthropologist of dance, traces the origins to Franz Boas, who suggested analyzing dance as culture. Jonathan Culler, in *The Pursuit of Signs*, argues that the true origins of analysis of symbolic action, seen correctly as systems of relations, “lie...in the work of Marx,” who showed that individual experience is made possible by the symbolic action systems of collectives. John J. MacAloon, historian and interpreter of the Olympic Games, reckons that performance studies got off to a rather promiscuous start, taking their origins from the nearly simultaneous activities of several different individuals: Milton Singer, Erving Goffman, Victor Turner, Gregory Bateson, and the “patron saint” of dramatism, Kenneth Burke. From MacAloon’s account, one can infer that the conjunction of these intellectual planets marks the dawning of the age of performance study as practitioners now understand it. Fingers of blame are pointed at these and at a number of other genitors in an effort to discover precisely whose intellectual baby performance theory is. Who would play Solomon the wise in such a matter? Performance theory resides in a series of cross-fertilizing questions posed by scholars in some disciplines to investigators in others: linguistics, cultural anthropology, sociology, performing arts, ethno-medicine, comparative law, social psychology, and ethnomusicology.¹⁵

What was happening in the anthropological world was a search for theories and paradigms with which anthropologists might be able to describe and understand the performative acts of diverse human cultures. The entrance of Schechner into that field of play brought with it the questions, experiences and practices of a performer, or one who experiments with performance itself. With this, the role of performers transformed from being the objects of study, to the role of subjective researchers, participant-investigators, and pragmatic theorists.

2.3. Performance: Object of Study and Means of Study

Both Ronald Pelias and Richard Schechner identify themselves as working in the area of Performance Studies. Pelias is rooted in the tradition of the oral interpretation of literature whereas Schechner is rooted in the tradition of Western theatre. Both to a certain extent work performatively with texts, and both expand the definition of what constitutes a text for study. Pelias uses performance in order to come to a deep understanding of a text or aesthetic utterance, whereas Schechner studies various performances and rituals in order to understand performance itself. Both are committed to the central necessity to study performance *by means of performance*. That is to say, in Performance Studies, per-

¹⁵ Lawrence E. Sullivan, “Sound and Senses: Toward a Hermeneutics of Performance,” *History of Religions* 26 no. 1 (Aug 1986), pp. 4-5. References cited within this citation include: Igor Kopytoff, “Revitalization and the Genesis of Cults in Pragmatic Religion,” in *Explorations in African Systems of Thought*, ed. Ivan Karp and Charles S. Bird (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1980), pp. 184-85; Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 26-27; John M. Foley, ed., *Oral Traditional Literature: A Festschrift for Albert Bates Lord* (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1981); Stanley Tambiah, *A Performance Approach to Ritual* (New York: State Mutual Book and Periodical Service, 1981); Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: the Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982).

formance is not only the object of study, but also the means for studying it. This may appear tautologous at first, but every methodology is actually theory-laden, and every form of research must be matched in some way to the thing being researched. Since performance events engage persons in their totality, Performance Studies claims a methodology based upon the total engagement of the researcher. And since performances occur within communal settings and spaces, Performance Studies claims a methodology that draws upon the gathered insights, knowledge and expertise of a community of scholars and practitioners.

Researchers such as Ronald Grimes have argued for the subjective experiences of the researcher to be part of the data¹⁶ and Victor and Edith Turner have used re-enacted rituals as a pedagogical process.¹⁷ Dwight Conquergood argues for the moral responsibility of ethnographers and performers of ethnographic research to become familiar with rather than removed from the people they study.

[E]thnographers work with expressivity, which is inextricable from its human creators. They must work with real people, humankind alive, instead of printed texts. Opening and interpreting lives is very different from opening and closing books. Perhaps that is why ethnographers worry more about acquiring experiential insight than maintaining aesthetic distance. Indeed they are calling for empathic performance as a way of intensifying the participative nature of fieldwork, and as a corrective to foreshorten the textual distance that results from writing monographs about the people with whom one lives and studies. When one keeps intellectual, aesthetic, or any other kind of distance from the other, ethnographers worry that other people will be held at an ethical and moral remove as well.¹⁸

The entry of performers as participant-investigators into Performance Studies described above paralleled a sea change in the way ethnography and anthropological and sociological research was being conducted. This change was reflected in challenges to the positivist presumptions of objectivity and personal distance of researchers from the cultural objects of study.¹⁹ “Postmodern ethnographers reject the concept of ‘objective truth’ and remind us that writing ethnography is cultural construction, not cultural reporting.”²⁰ Postmodern thought influenced especially by Michel Foucault has come to recognize the power of intellectual discourse to construct culture, or, more to the point, to construct what is presumed to be the culture under consideration.²¹ Postmodern criticism has pointed to the power dynamics involved in such an endeavor, and has called for a self-

¹⁶ Ronald Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982).

¹⁷ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, “Performing Ethnography,” in *The Drama Review* 26 no. 2 [94], (Summer 1982), pp. 33-50.

¹⁸ Dwight Conquergood, “Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance,” *Literature in Performance* 5 no. 2 (April 1985), p. 2.

¹⁹ See the discussion of this in George E. Marcus and Dick Cushman, “Ethnographies as Texts,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11 (1982), pp. 25-69.

²⁰ Tanice G. Foltz and Wendy Griffin, “She Changes Everything She Touches: Ethnographic Journeys of Self Discovery” in *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*, Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, eds., (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1996), p. 301.

²¹ Michele Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (New York: Pantheon Press, 1972).

conscious recognition of the nature of the politics involved in any form of discourse about an "other."²² "Hermeneutic philosophy in its varying styles, from Wilhelm Dilthey and Paul Ricoeur to Heidegger, reminds us that the simplest cultural accounts are intentional creations, that interpreters constantly construct themselves through the others they study."²³ Thus ethnographic writing is "always a construction of the self as well as of the other."²⁴ As ethnographers have experimented with authorial voice,²⁵ narrative structure and play,²⁶ writing strategies and genres, and examined the dynamics and politics of the text itself,²⁷ some feminist writers have voiced cautions about the postmodern turns in these scholarly endeavors.²⁸ Among these are a call to recognize that the Western researcher still speaks from the place of the dominant observer, the role of the subjective experiences of the researcher remain problematic, and a reminder that Feminist theory has dealt with the same issues raised in postmodernism for fifty years (since the publication of *the Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir).²⁹

All of these players have contributed to the field of play and contestation of which Performance Studies has been a part, and out of which it has arisen. A Performance Hermeneutic is a particular application of these developments in Performance Studies, hermeneutics and Feminism which grounds itself in the givenness of the researcher as an embodied being whose subjective experiences and full sensorium serve as part of the data as well as the means of its interpretation.

²² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Random House, 1979). See James Clifford's review and critique of Said, "Review of *Orientalism* by E.W. Said," *Historical Theory* 19 (1980), pp. 204-13.

²³ James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, J. Clifford and G. Marcus, eds., (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 10.

²⁴ J. Stacey, "Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?" in *Women's Words*, Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 115, cited in Foltz and Griffin, "She Changes Everything She Touches," *op. cit.*

²⁵ See Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*, *op. cit.*, Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, eds., *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*, (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1996); Susan Krieger, *Social Science and the Self: Personal Essays on an Art Form*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991); R. Linden, *Making Stories, Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993).

²⁶ For examples, see Laurel Richardson, "Narrative and Sociology," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 19 (1990), pp.116-135; "Writing as a Method of Inquiry," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Edited by N.K. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, (Thousand Oaks: Sage. 1994), pp. 516-529; David R. Maines, "Narrative's Moment and Sociology's Phenomena: Toward a Narrative Sociology," *Sociological Quarterly*, 34 (1993), pp.17-38; N. K. Denzin, "Representing Lived Experiences in Ethnographic Texts," in *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, vol. 12, N. K. Denzin, ed., (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1991), pp. 59-70; Carolyn Ellis, *Final Negotiations: A Story of Love, Loss, and Chronic Illness*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

²⁷ Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*, *op. cit.*; George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, 2nd edition, (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1999); George E. Marcus, and D. Cushman, "Ethnographies as Texts," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 11 (1982), pp. 25-69.

²⁸ Frances E. Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Ballerino Cohen, "The Post-Modernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 15 (1989), pp. 7-33.

²⁹ *Ibid.*; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (1949 in French; in English, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1953).

3. A Performance Hermeneutic Approach

A Performance Hermeneutic approach to the study of religious phenomena is derived from the central insight of Performance Studies regarding the study of performance by means of performance. At its core, a Performance Hermeneutic is interdisciplinary. Of course, interdisciplinary scholarship is receiving greater attention and emphasis in academic circles these days. However, at academic conferences, interdisciplinary work is usually considered only between *academic* disciplines. The project of a Performance Hermeneutic stresses what I would argue is a true interdisciplinarity: a movement between academic and performing disciplines. What a Performance Hermeneutic offers is a way for persons to be *interdisciplined* - to act out of their integrity as persons who move and think within an embodied milieu rather than in a strictly intellectual or rationally intellectual milieu.

To speak of an embodied milieu means that all aspects of bodily existence impinge upon human experience, and thus upon human knowing and understanding - which, of course, is the task of hermeneutics. Much of hermeneutical theory since Friedrich Schleiermacher has granted significance to the interaction between a text and its author and/or its reader. Whether stated in the psychologistic terminology of Schleiermacher, and his predecessors, Friedrich Ast and Friedrich August Wolf, or in terms of the spokenness of language (*Sprache*) by Hans Georg Gadamer, the fundamental requirement for interpretation is the presence of a person as a somatic entity. In other words, interpretation requires bodies.

Our *initial*, immediate experience of all phenomena is physical. That is to say, all knowledge, every event which occurs, is mediated physically. Hearing, speaking, seeing, tasting, touching, thinking all occur as physical acts. Events that do not directly involve human beings are perceived by them through physical means (thus, in some sense, involving them physically, if indirectly). John W. Dixon, Jr. has phrased the matter succinctly:

The least we can grant ... is the remorseless corporeality of the human enterprise. All thought is bodily thought. All metaphor is the body's metaphor. We think not *in* but with our bodies and the psychic life is a whole *with* the body.³⁰

3.1. The Body Thinks

However, a Performance Hermeneutic is not only based upon the existential givenness of human embodiment, it is also based upon the physiological commitment that the body *thinks*. When I speak here of the body thinking, I am not separating the brain out from the rest of the body, as James B. Ashbrook and Carol Rausch Albright do in their recent book, *The Humanizing Brain*.³¹ In their book, Ashbrook and Albright “propose that the concept of ‘mind’ bridges the complexities of the physical universe and the complexities of the human world.... the brain of *Homo sapiens* reflects something basic to the setting in which it finds itself. It seems that, in an important sense, the humanizing brain mirrors the world that births it.” They make the claim that the human brain evolved

³⁰ John W. Dixon, Jr., “Prolegomena to a Christian Erotics: Reflections on Norman O. Brown's *Love's Body*,” in *Christian Scholar*, 50, no. 1, (Spring, 1967), p. 61. Emphasis in the original.

³¹ James B. Ashbrook and Carol Rausch Albright, *The Humanizing Brain: Where Religion and Neuroscience Meet*, (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1997).

through the normal evolutionary process of interaction with our world, and that human responsiveness to the world, including the search for meaning, the perception of the world’s “tangibleness, its wondrous order, its emotionality and directionality, even its unpredictability,”³² is a reflection of those realities within the structure of physical existence itself. There is not space here to develop any of their ideas further, except to indicate what I find to be problematic, and that is their insistence on situating *mind*, particularly its rational and imaginal aspects, within the physical confines of the brain alone. My contention, and there are neurophysiological reasons for this, is that *the whole body thinks*.

For instance, if you were to remove everything from a human body leaving behind only the intact nervous system, you would have a nearly identical human form. Nerves make contact with every organ, tissue system and living cell in our body. Neurotransmitters found in the brain are also found in our fingertips, viscera, skin and glands. There is evidence that the body remembers particular events somatically, and that emotional memories reside not only within the brain, but also within certain regions of the body. In fact, it may be that the brain’s process of remembering functions in such a way as to bring into consciousness those memories that may be stored elsewhere in the body.

Howard Gardner, in his influential book, *Frames of Mind*, discusses what he calls bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. Referring to the alleged disjunction between the activities of reasoning and the activities of “the manifestly physical,” Gardner states that “this divorce between the ‘mental’ and the ‘physical’ has not infrequently been coupled with a notion that what we do with our bodies is somehow less privileged, less special, than those problem-solving routines carried out chiefly through the use of language, logic, or some other relatively abstract symbolic system.”³³

Yet, as Roger Sperry, the doyen of American neuropsychologists, has shrewdly pointed out, a strong case can be made for considering higher brain functions in terms of how they situate the organism in their environment in relation to survival and the attainment of distant goals:

Instead of regarding motor activity as being subsidiary, that is, something to carry out, serve and satisfy the demands of the higher centers, we reverse this tendency and look upon mental activity as only a means to an end, where the end is better regulation of overt response. Cerebration essentially serves to bring into motor behavior additional refinement, increased direction toward distant, future goals and greater overall adaptiveness and survival value. The evolutionary increase in man’s capacity for perception, feeling, ideation, imagination and the like may be regarded not so much as an end in itself as something that has enabled us to behave, to act, more wisely and efficiently.³⁴

It is possible to depict a continuum existing between the physical perception of a problem (such as through one of the senses), the abstract processing of the problem (including “naming” the problem, making value judgments, construction of a context of any

³² *Ibid.*, p. xxxii.

³³ Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1983), pp. 207-208.

³⁴ Roger Sperry is quoted in E. Evarts, “Brain Mechanisms in Movement,” *Scientific American* 229, no. 1, (July 1973), p. 103.

sort for it, etc.), decision-making and the physical execution of the decision. According to current research, the postulated neurophysiological process involved is actually very similar to the continuum described. Impulses received from the sensory system travel to the brain wherein a series of electrochemical signals are distributed across a network of regions in the brain finally resulting in signals being sent back to the neurons embedded in muscle tissue which stimulate movement.

Within the nervous system, large portions of the cerebral cortex, as well as the thalamus, the basal ganglia, and the cerebellum, all feed information to the spinal cord, the way station *en route* to the execution of action.³⁵

Furthermore, Gardner adds this tantalizing observation:

Paradoxically, whereas the cortex serves as the “highest” center in most forms of human activity, it is the relatively lowly basal ganglia and the cerebellum that contain the most abstract and complex forms of “representation of movements;” the motor complex is more directly tied to the spinal cord and the actual execution of specific muscular movements.³⁶

All of this simply serves to illustrate what I mean by saying “the body thinks.” What a Performance Hermeneutic does is to think with the fullness of the body, of which the brain is an integral part.

3.2. A Performance Hermeneutic and the Performing Arts

A Performance Hermeneutic is derived from the work of performing artists, more specifically that of theater and acting. Of particular relevance to a Performance Hermeneutic are the problem-solving tactics employed in rehearsals by theater performers and stage actors, particularly as they come out of the European and North American theater tradition. There is nothing magical, mystical, esoteric or earth-shatteringly novel about these tactics. What is useful about them is the manner in which they take the embodiedness of the performer seriously and the way in which the subjectivity of the performer is central to the interpretive process. In addition, the collaborative process that is characteristic of rehearsal and performance is essential to a performance Hermeneutic.

One of the central questions that governs the exploratory phase of a play rehearsal is “What if...?” In improvisationally-based rehearsals, the actors are given a scenario, which is a bare outline of characters and situation. The actors then create a scene and story on the spot, *de novo*, as it were. Then a director or “outside eye” may then ask them a series of “what if...” questions, such as “What if you were to play it this way,” or “What if you were to use this intention,” or “What if this were your past relationship,” etc. The scene is then played and replayed and replayed again until the various possible or relevant “What if” questions are exhausted. Asking “What if” questions sets up a situation in which a scene or problem or phenomenon is scrutinized from several vantage points, much like viewing a precious gem from the standpoint of all its various facets.

³⁵ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

The “What if” question is ontogenetically related to the young child’s “Let’s pretend” in that it involves an imaginative leap into playing with possibilities, and then bringing those possibilities into some form of actualization. The imagination constructs a virtual world, and the act of pretending or improvising in rehearsal serves to place the body of the performer in that virtual world, causing that which is virtual to become actual, or nearly actual, or at least actual during the timeframe of the improvisation. This, of course, is how any performance, theatrical and otherwise, functions: by creating a virtual world or landscape, placing the bodies of performers and audience members within that world, and then returning performers and audience to the world from which they came. Always, however, the landscape to which one returns is not entirely the same, because the memory of the landscape or world visited in performance impinges upon consciousness, and reminds one of the ease with which the imagination slips between worlds.

In rehearsals and performance, the performer works with the imagination in its fully embodied form. Performance can be thus thought of as embodied imagination, and the body itself is the vehicle of movement between worlds, virtual and actual. A Performance Hermeneutic helps to develop the imagination’s capacities and employs these capacities as part of the learning and research process. The student or researcher moves constantly between participation in a performance, ritual or other event and analysis and reflection upon that participation. The whole organism of the student or researcher - the senses, feelings, emotions, thoughts, body movement and kinesthetic perceptions - is involved in the collection of information and its processing, as well as the analysis and synthesis of ideas, conclusions (however tentative), and theories.

3.3. A Performance Hermeneutic and Feminist Criticism

In their essay, “She Changes Everything She Touches: Ethnographic Journeys of Self Discovery (1),” Tanice Foltz and Wendy Griffin make this statement concerning their ethnographic methodology: “We inject our voices into the experimental movement in ethnography that seeks to heal the artificial separation of subject and object, modulate the ‘authorial voice,’ and acknowledge our subjective involvement in the creation of social knowledge.”³⁷ Their description of the experimental movement in ethnography reveals not only its post-modern influences, but also the influences of Feminist thought upon academic scholarship as well.

Feminist scholarship has raised pertinent critiques concerning the production of knowledge and epistemological claims concerning access to universal truth. Feminist theory, for example, begins with an examination of the gender and power-based constructions of knowledge and epistemology. One of the strongest critiques is leveled at the Cartesian dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity, with objectivity being prized (and supposedly exhibited to a greater extent by men) over subjectivity (supposedly exhibited, of course, by women). Dale Spender discusses the Feminist critique of objectivity: “As a legitimating device, objectivity has served the dominant group well. Faced with the objective evidence that women are inferior, women have been discouraged from promoting

³⁷ Tanice G. Foltz and Wendy Griffin, “She Changes Everything She Touches: Ethnographic Journeys of Self Discovery (1)” in Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, eds., *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*, (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1996), pp. 301-330.

change for the very definition of objective is ‘exhibiting actual facts uncoloured by exhibitor’s feelings or opinions’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*).³⁸

The rationality of the Enlightenment and the development of the Empiricism of Bacon and others were premised upon the singularity and universality of truth, which exists as an object outside of the individual and thus is untainted by the subjective feelings and impressions of the individual. In order to have access to this realm of universal truth, the individual must learn to think in an objective and detached manner. Such activities and theories of knowledge were circulated and affirmed in circles of men, of course, with various theories and ideas advanced concerning the “objectivity” of men and the “subjectivity” of women. Feminists have challenged both the gender division of objectivity and subjectivity as well as the claims of any group to have privileged access to universal truth. This has resulted in a different style of speaking about what is known and discovered through research, reflection and communal processing. “With this fundamental challenge to the objectivity of objectivity there has been a shift in feminist development. With it has come the acknowledgement that subjectivity plays a crucial role in the construction of knowledge and that rather than construct knowledge about women which ‘out-objectifies’ the knowledge constructed by men, new criteria for credibility are called for.”³⁹

Part of the critique of supposed objectivity revolves around the role played by the “objective” observer as a spectator. Much of the earliest Feminist theorizing focused upon what men said about women. Spender describes it this way:

Women came to realize that the knowledge which men constructed about women...was frequently rated as “objective” while the knowledge women began to construct about women (which has its origins in the role of a participant rather than a spectator) was frequently rated as “subjective.” When men checked with men, their pronouncements were usually seen as credible, but when women checked with women, their explanations were frequently seen as illogical, emotional and liable to be dismissed by men. The hypothesis arose that legitimacy might be associated with gender rather than with the adequacy of an explanation, and this has led Adrienne Rich to comment that in a patriarchal society, objectivity is the name we give to male subjectivity.⁴⁰

Moving from a gender-based critique of objectivity, Feminist thinkers turned to a critique of the notions of objectivity and universal truth. “[T]here is a significant difference between the way men have checked with men and often presented their explanations as the complete and only truth, and the way women are checking with women and offering their explanations as partial and temporary ‘truths’.”⁴¹ Feminist thought focuses upon the idea of a multiplicity of truths, which are grounded in the particularities of one’s material existence: particularities such as gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality and cultural identity, class background, etc. Truth is bound up with subjectivity. But it is not to be abandoned or disregarded because of this. Rather, the task becomes one of sharing our

³⁸ Dale Spender, “Introduction,” in Dale Spender, ed., *Men’s Studies Modified: The Impact of Feminism on the Academic Disciplines*, (Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press, 1981), pages 4-5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.

⁴⁰ Spender, *op cit.*, p. 5. See Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silences*, (New York: Norton, 1979).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

particularities and listening for expressions of truths in the experiences of others. Sociologist Ellen Stone argues for a combination of Feminist “disbelief” (suspicion of traditional systems of knowledge and research, “heretical” viewpoints, etc.) and Feminist “belief.”

We need a different stance in relation to the voices of subordinated cultures - one I call, for the moment, “feminist belief.” Feminist belief means putting aside our conditioned responses and allowing ourselves to experience total receptivity to “the other.” It means before subjecting previously silenced voices to our critical faculties, we need to take them in to find out how they resonate and what their truth might mean for us.⁴²

What this means for research and teaching is still being determined. In fact, it is better to not say “determined” because Feminist theory tends to be processual rather than static, and there is really no terminus to arrive at or discover.

Because this new style is still being formed ... it is not possible to categorically define it. What can be said is that it is personal and political, and this constitutes a significant difference. Rather than separate the personal and political from the production of knowledge, feminists are attempting to bring them together and in this synthesis they are striving to construct more accurate, adequate and comprehensive explanations...than those which emerged under the reign of objectivity, and male supremacy. Feminists have focused on ‘research on research’ and have been extremely critical of the way in which knowledge has for so long been presented as a *fait accompli* with little or no acknowledgement of the part played by the personal in the process of producing such knowledge. Instead of trying to be ‘detached’, feminists are blatantly ‘involved’ in the knowledge which they are producing and unlike the traditional model in which the researcher is presumed to be ‘outside’ the subject matter being researched, feminist contributions frequently testify to the way in which women are changed by the research process. This is a concrete example of the way women are trying to bring politics and knowledge together.⁴³

Elizabeth Gross offers the following as a sketch of what Feminist theory can involve:⁴⁴

- a. Intellectual commitments, not to truth, objectivity and neutrality, but to theoretical positions openly acknowledged as observer and context-specific.
- b. It is neither subjective nor objective, neither absolute nor relative. Rather, its norms of judgment are developed from intersubjective, shared effects and functions. (p. 365)
- c. Instead of presuming a space or gulf between the rational, knowing subject and the object known, feminist theory acknowledges the contiguity between them. Femi-

⁴² Ellen Stone, “Claiming the Third Story: The Challenge to White Feminists of Black Feminist Theory,” unpublished manuscript, Brandeis University, 1990. Quoted in Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 242.

⁴³ Spender, *op cit.*, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Gross, “What is Feminist Theory?” in Crowley, Helen, and Himmelweit, Susan, eds. *Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge*. Cambridge, UK: The Open University, 1992, pp. 355-369.

- nist theory seems openly prepared to accept the constitutive interrelations of the subject, its social position and its mediated relation to the object. (p. 365)
- d. Feminist theory is an interweaving of strands that are simultaneously theoretical and practical. It is a threshold for the intervention of theories within concrete practices, and the restructuring of theory by the imperatives of experience and practice, a kind of hinge or doorway between the two domains. (pp. 366-367)
 - e. Feminist theory seeks to transform and extend the concept of reason so that instead of excluding concepts like experience, the body, history, etc., these are included within it or acknowledged as necessary for reason to function. It seeks a rationality not divided from experience, from oppression, from particularity or specificity; a reason, on the contrary, that includes them is a rationality not beyond or above experience but based upon it. (p. 367)
 - f. Feminist theory openly acknowledges its own materiality as the materiality of language, of desire and of power. (p. 368)
 - g. In rejecting leading models of intellectual inquiry (among them, the requirements of formal logic, the structuring of concepts according to binary oppositional structures, the use of grammar and syntax for creating singular, clear, unambiguous, precise modes of articulation and many other assumed textual values), and its acceptance of the idea of its materiality as theory, feminist theory is involved in continuing explorations of and experimentation with new forms of writing, new methods of analysis, new positions of enunciation, new kinds of discourse. (p. 368)

From these examples, the parallels and commonalities between Feminism and a Performance Hermeneutic are obvious. A Performance Hermeneutic is influenced by Feminism in recognizing the role of subjectivity and the spuriousness of claims to pure objectivity, the multiplicity of centers of knowledge and experience, the multiplicity of truths, the suspicion of universalizing, and the role of the personal in the production of knowledge. A Performance Hermeneutic can offer back to Feminist thought a pedagogical process that engages the researcher/student bodily, sensually, emotionally, personally, subjectively, and experientially.

3.4. A Performance Hermeneutic In Practice

As has been argued, a Performance Hermeneutic engages the researcher holistically in an integrated and internally interdisciplinary manner. It stresses work in the field, wherein the full embodied “research apparatus” of the researcher can be engaged with the persons and situations being studied. One of the best ways to develop this Performance Hermeneutical “research apparatus” or methodology is through performance training itself, particularly in the area of improvisation. A Performance Hermeneutic then takes this improvisational training and adds the dimensions of personal and group reflection, critical theory and analysis, dialogue, and open-ended conversation. These added dimensions move the process of interpretation away from an individualistic endeavor to a community-oriented project. An outstanding example of one particular style of Performance Hermeneutic is what I call Performance Midrash.

3.5. Performance Midrash: An Example from Germany

So, how does a Performance Hermeneutic operate, how does it utilize performance and rehearsal techniques, and how does it make explicit the connection between the performed world and the lived world? The best way to answer these questions is to give a concrete example of a Performance Hermeneutic seminar I recently led at the Evangelisches Studienwerk at Villigst, Germany in the summer of 1996. (At the time, I had not yet begun to refer to the process as Performance Midrash, but still as a Performance Hermeneutic). This example is pertinent to this dissertation in that it demonstrates how I have applied performance and rehearsal practices to the work of interpretation. In this example, the Performance Hermeneutic is applied to a particular biblical text. However it can be applied to many forms of texts, written or not.

The seminar consisted of seven participants and myself. Of the participants, one was North American, the others German. Two were pastors serving churches, and the others were theological students at various points in their programs. Of the seven one was male and the rest were female. The design of the class was to explore a particular biblical passage using a Performance Hermeneutic over a period of several days, in two daily three-hour sessions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

The morning sessions each began with a period of body warm-up and movement exercises derived from the Integral Transformative Practice Kata designed by George Leonard and Michael Murphy in their book, *The Life We Are Given*.⁴⁵ This served to awaken their bodies and to sink their consciousness fully in their bodies. We then turned our attention to the particular biblical text we had chosen to investigate, exegete and interpret. The text was Genesis 16:1-6, the story of Hagar and Sarai, the birth of Ishmael, and Hagar’s flight into the desert.

The passage was read in German and English, since we had a bilingual class, with varying language proficiencies being represented. Then the group retold the story, and there was some discussion about the various translations. The next step was to list all the various feelings that members of the group perceived and detected in the story. We then proceeded with improvisatory work aimed at playing out those feelings along with the story line. The story was broken into “french scenes,” or scenes involving a certain set of characters. When a character exits or a new character enters the scene, it is a different “french scene.” For each scene, we listed the various feelings perceived, and then asked the question, “What do these feelings look like?” People then moved about the space making sounds, vocalizing pertinent lines, making bodily gestures and displaying various bodily attitudes and representations of emotions. Then the group made sculptures of the feelings by standing in relationship with other members of the group. I then went around and asked each person what feeling they were portraying and then had them interact with other members of the group, all the while still acting as the feeling they had chosen to portray. They could use lines from the text or whatever they felt arise for them out of their portrayal. We then discussed whatever insights people had concerning the text. This process was repeated for each scene of the biblical story.

The story of Hagar and Sarai is problematic on many levels, and has been the source of probing analysis by various feminist scholars. Our group found it no less problematic after working at this first level of improvisation with the feeling level of the story.

⁴⁵ George Leonard and Michael Murphy, *The Life We Are Given: A Long-Term Program for Realizing the Potential of Body, Mind, Heart and Soul*, (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam Books, 1995).

When faced with enacting the story and probing the emotions, feelings, motivations and intentions of the characters, as any actor does in the theater, it became clear to the group that the story of Hagar and Sarai left much out. For instance, Hagar is portrayed as being relatively passive in the face of the abuse she receives from Sarai, and again as she is told by the angel in the desert to return to Sarai. Several participants expressed objections concerning the angel telling Hagar to return and submit to Sarai.

In order to delve even deeper, we continued our improvisational work again, looking at different angles of the conversation between the angel and Hagar. For example, at one point, the group was split in two, with three people playing Hagar (together) and four people playing the angel. The groups were each given the task to decide what feelings they would play from within their character, and how they would relate to the other group, say, as individuals or as a group. In addition, the angel group was given the task of physically moving the Hagar group from one location to another. Interesting things arose out of this improvisation. The Hagar group sat huddled together with arms interlinked. The angel group came over with arms gently outstretched, but then had to sit down at the same level as Hagar. A long negotiation ensued. What happened in these improvisations was that Hagar was given a voice - the voice that is denied her or is hidden in the text.

The next phase of the work was to retell the story from a variety of vantage points. In the first retelling exercise, the group was split three ways. Three people replayed the story very close to the Biblical text. Two were allowed to interrupt the story at any point, make comments, play the scene differently, or whatever, utilizing insights from the preceding improvisations. Two people sat outside the performance space and observed, in order to offer a final retelling. In the discussion following this exercise, the two people who followed the biblical story closely expressed dissatisfaction with their task, and the observers offered some additional alternatives to the scenes portrayed by the other two groups.

The final session of the class devoted to Hagar and Sarai was spent retelling the story from the viewpoints of each of the characters, as well as a final grand retelling. Two people portrayed Sarai, one person portrayed Abram, two portrayed Hagar and two portrayed the angel. Each group was allowed to present the story in any way they wished. For example, the two people portraying Sarai sat back to back and each gave voice to different internal conversations within Sarai. The person portraying Abram showed his emotion and anger. The Hagar pair traded roles, one being the storyteller while the other pantomimed the story being told. The angel group broke up into an angel in charge and a junior angel, who was given the task of talking with Hagar. It brought a humorous element to the story. What emerged most clearly in these sessions was the element of performed Midrash. The collections of Midrash and legends of the Jews begin in the biblical story and proceed to spin out humorous and serious stories and elaborations, often providing dialogue where none exists in the biblical text. Precisely the same thing occurred through the act of performance in this workshop.

The final retelling returned the group to the presumed oral character of the stories, told supposedly around campfires, or at feasts and celebrations. We all sat in a circle, a story-telling circle. I began to retell the story as if we were at a campfire and someone asked me, “Tell us again the story about Hagar and Sarai.” As I told the story, I would ask questions of people, or ask them to fill in the details, or they would interrupt and jump in the middle of the story and retell a section, enact it and return to the circle. If others in the

group disagreed with the telling, or had more to tell, they would jump in and do their enactment. A variety of interpretations and perspectives were given voice, and new ideas and understandings arose even in this session.

In the discussion following the final retelling, it was agreed that most of our work in the preceding sessions had been brought together successfully in the storytelling circle, and that even new insights were achieved. Everything we had done had found a place within our bodies’ memories. Some indicated that it was okay with them that they were still dissatisfied with this story, and that it was good to leave this story unresolved. We had probed its injustices, its themes of abuse, its problems and untold stories. We had given voice to the voiceless, and had enacted, in essence, a hermeneutics of suspicion, as well as a feminist and liberationist analysis. Yet, these were never a part of the specific agenda of the class. Rather, they arose in the process of performing the text.

4. Concluding Observations

In this paper, I have discussed at length the development of the field of Performance Studies and have situated a Performance Hermeneutic within it. I have argued for the place of a Performance Hermeneutic in returning subjectivity to the body in the process of interpretation. I have argued that a Performance Hermeneutic is interdisciplinary not only because it moves between academic and aesthetic disciplines, but because it requires for its practitioners to be interdisciplined themselves: to act out of their integrity as embodied persons. This interdisciplining is reflected in the fact that the body in its entirety thinks. In interpreting a text, a Performance Hermeneutic works with this integrity by placing the bodies of performer-interpreters within the imaginal landscape of the text being interpreted and allowing them to “play” with the text in order to examine the text from various vantage points.

I then gave a particular example of a Performance Hermeneutic in action, relating how it was used with a group of people in Germany as the group interpreted the story in Genesis 16:1-16 of Sarai and Hagar. The Performance Hermeneutic process used by the group resulted in a form of Midrash in which the story was retold in such a way that agency and subjectivity were returned to those dispossessed in the text (such as Hagar).

From this, I offer the following additional conclusions concerning a Performance Hermeneutic. The process of embodying a text changes the nature of our relationship with that text, and the act of embodying the text in the collaboration of improvisatory performance removes any single experience from the center of interpretation. Interpretation becomes the province of the community, and hegemonies of interpretation can be challenged. A Performance Hermeneutic can be used in a variety of settings with a variety of adaptations, and it does not require sophistication with hermeneutical theory, biblical or literary criticism, nor does it even require performance experience. Rather, it takes advantage of the human propensity to pretend, to imagine and to play. At the same time, while playing, the embodied person gains powerful insights - insights that are powerfully experienced, and powerfully stored within the body’s reservoir of memory. From that reservoir transformation of self and society is possible.