An Aesthetics of Narrative Performance

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The prestige of the theater has all too often been invoked to contrast, or even to oppose, the performance arts with those, such as fictional or historical narrative, that ‘report’ and do not mime their events: theater and narrative, mimesis and diegesis, performance and text, the body and the word—as if the one would purge the other the better to colonize an exclusive domain. Yet this opposition always fails . . . narrative and theater are more like ‘fraternal enemies’ than mutually exclusive opposites.

—Nelson, Freadman, and Anderson 9–10, quoting Marie Maclean

The Starting Point
OVERLAPPING ‘PERFORMATIVE’ AND ‘NARRATIVE TURNS’

When I arrived in Berlin in the beginning of 2008 on a fellowship to research and write this book, one of the first theater productions I saw was Stefan Bachmann’s Liebe Kannibalen Godard (Love Cannibals Godard), a visiting performance by the Hamburg-based Thalia Theater at the Maxim Gorki Theater. As suggested by its title, the play by Thomas Jonigk, on which the evening’s performance was based, is a loose adaptation of Jean-Luc Godard’s Week-end from 1967. With its famous closing declaration of the “end of tale” as the “end of cinema,” Week-end has entered the canon of European art cinema history as the film that marks the end of “narrative”—or conventional narrative form—
in Godard's oeuvre and, by extension, in the cinematic counterculture of the new wave (e.g., Dixon 88–89, 99; see Wollen). On the verge of the student revolution in Paris as well as Berlin, Berkeley, and Istanbul, avant-garde aesthetics found its politically radical form in the turn against a series of overlapping concepts associated with narrative, including ‘plot,’ ‘fiction,’ ‘representation,’ ‘ideology,’ ‘text,’ and ‘language.’ Building on the respective critical legacy of European and American modernism—from futurism and Dada to Antonin Artaud’s “Theater of Cruelty” and John Cage’s *Untitled Event*—the arts now seemed to have lost even any “nostalgia for the lost narrative” (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 41). Retrospectively, this shift was associated with the aesthetics of postmodernism, which replaced (already contended forms of) ‘narrative’ with ‘process/performance/happening.’¹ As elaborated by cultural theory in the following decades, narrative served the formation of—individual or collective, actual or phantasmatic—identities in time.² More specifically, it was taken to enable the kind of ideologically problematic identity formation that had dominated European culture throughout the modern era. Having made “History” into “the fundamental mode of being” (Foucault, *The Order of Things* 219), this era constituted its hegemonic masculinities in apprenticeship novels and founded European imperialism on the claim that the (African) ‘other’ presumably had no history (Hegel 163; see also Soja 164–74).

Against the legacy of such narrative coherence building, the modernist avant-gardes “spread the . . . gospel of performance” (Blau 159), before their postmodernist successors in the arts as well as academia further enthroned the opposition between narrative and performance by theorizing performance through its emphasis on space and the present rather than history, “as a site of social transgression” and artistic “subversion” and (Jackson 14, 30). Importantly, there are alternative traditions—for example, building on the early anthropological work of Victor Turner—in which performance has been conceptualized in analogy to narrative, as a vehicle of individual or collective identity formation.³ A number of performance scholars have emphasized that its workings are not always subversive vis-à-vis the forms of social cohe-

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1. Hassan 123. On the association between performance and the postmodern (as well as the need to qualify it on historical grounds) see Carlson, *Performance* 137, 139.

2. For an overview of the ideology-critical takes from the 1970s into the 1990s see Mark Currie. More recently, the discussion of narrative and identity has veritably exploded under new, mostly positive premises. See, e.g., Brockmeier and Carbaugh; Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*; Holstein and Gubrium; Hutto; McAdams, Josselson, and Lieblich; Strawson and the following debates, e.g., Battersby.

3. Reminiscent of classical plots, Turner in fact describes ritual (with van Gennep) as a three-step process of “separation, transition, and incorporation” (24, italics in original).
sion and textual authority associated with narrative (e.g., McKenzie; Tyler; Worthen). Overall, however, the “former-activists-turned-professional-intellectuals” who shaped the field have, as Shannon Jackson comments with a gently polemical touch, been much more interested in the undoing of identities (174). Reminiscent of the happenings of the 1960s (see Silverman and Farocki 91, 96), Godard’s road saga certainly contributes to such undoing with the ways it celebrates the spectacle of burning cars, slapstick fights, and cinematic blood and gore while accompanying its bourgeois couple on their way to some (murderous) family business in the provinces. Furthermore, the film showcases flashy intertitles that declare disrespect for hegemonic temporal and logical norms, or “the end of the grammatical era and the beginning of flamboyance in all fields, especially the cinema.” Labeling itself, in another intertitle, as “found on the scrapheap,” the film is “itself made of scraps, of quotes both filmic and textual,” which violate the “linear development” of the text. A “mise en scène . . . of expenditure” in Bataille’s sense, Week-end is governed by “the logic of excess” (Westbrook 348–49), culminating in the cannibalistic feast highlighted in Bachmann’s title, which in the film is accompanied by ‘barbaric’ drum rhythms along with the ritualistic chants of Arthur Rimbaud’s modernist poetry.

Although attesting to the continued appeal of Godard’s imagination, the recent theater adaptation I saw in Berlin signals also that times have changed. To be sure, Western society looks just as self-destructive as in 1967. In an introductory speech, the cannibal chief, masked as an urban restaurant chef, compares the state to the mythical Cronos, who devours his own children, and emphasizes that “contemporary man” is a “commodity” consumed by its peers (Liebe Kannibal en Godard 2). While revolution no longer seems as imminent as in 1967, one of the loudspeaker voice-overs replacing Godard’s intertitles in the theater insists that “A SINGLE NONREVOLUTIONARY WEEKEND IS MUCH BLOODIER THAN A MONTH OF REVOLUTION.” However, already the cook’s introductory monologue with its mythical references and grand-scale analytics also suggests that narrative—as a means of ordering and evaluating the world—might be back with a vengeance. Toward the end of the night, the ch(i)ef addresses the audience with, as a slightly dismayed critic put it, “flaming speeches” against “all-consuming relativism” (Kaempf). The cook’s analysis of contemporary society is organized around the critically humanist

4. My translation (differing from the subtitles of the video edition used).
5. Westbrook 345, 347, quoting George Bataille (italics in original).
6. Liebe Kannibalen Godard 33. Translations from this script and all subsequently discussed materials not available in translation/with subtitles are my own. I include the German original wherever the translation is not entirely straightforward.
motif of “man’s” metamorphosis into a “monster” who does not even sense his inability to feel for others any longer (Jonigk 36–37). Whereas the concluding scenario of Godard’s film took place in the lush ‘wilderness’ of the forest, Bachmann’s cook serves his “heavy moral fare,” which the critics found to be out of tune with the otherwise “pleasurable evening,” at what the sparse set design indicates to be a Last Supper table (Kaempf; see similarly also Briegleb). To be sure, the cook’s speech receives an ironic tint from the fact that he is himself thoroughly implicated in the cannibalistic feast on which he comments. Nonetheless, the critics’ responses suggest that his explicit ‘grand’ narrative about the loss of humanity may have fulfilled a didactic function in guiding the audience’s meaning-making process.

The adaptation’s respective emphasis is, perhaps, not surprising in that it fits with a familiar tale about the present moment. More than once, critics have announced that the cultural reign of performative subversion—sometimes associated with “ludic” postmodernism (Morton)—has come to its end, and narrative has returned onto the stage of contemporary Western culture. At the latest, it seems, the forces of more or less authoritative telling and ethically motivated coherence building have gained a newly hegemonic status after September 11, but the move ‘beyond’ postmodernism certainly was proclaimed already in the nineties (e.g., see Adam and Allan). In fact, conservatives called for “a return to ‘moral fiction’” as early as 1978 (Clayton 378, quoting John Gardner). But the diagnosis gets even murkier once we tune into the interfering echoes of narrative’s early returns—or simply its perseverance?—in quite different contexts of later twentieth-century politics and aesthetics. In the realm of performance art itself, many alternative—African diaspora, feminist, gay and lesbian—productions even of the late 1960s and 1970s dissented from the antinarrative purism that shaped its hegemonic conceptualizations, exploring history, “myth,” or the “self,” for example, through autobiographical forms (see Carlson, *Performance* 162). While the “happenings” of Allan Kaprow, Richard Schechner, and others sought “to stage absolute reduction” and “primal” experiences of presence, their colleagues from the Harlem New Lafayette Theater “made no effort to avoid signification” (Jackson 131–32). From the perspective of social marginalization, such reduction would simply not do; the experience of being written out of dominant history complicated matters when it came to narrative (see also Carlson, *Performance* 130; Benston 21, 29).

In fact, the narrative-vs.-performance opposition, which is so commonplace in mainstream theory and criticism, makes significantly less sense specifically from the angle of African diaspora aesthetics. Closely aligned in the
conceptualization of African oral expression and storytelling (see, e.g., P. Johnson 7), both performance and narrative have been significantly racialized in the modern European imaginary. While on the one hand, narrative has been conceptualized as a dominant mode of modern European identity formation, it has, on the other, figured as a traditional, “customary” form of knowledge (Lytotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 19). Meanwhile, the ‘non-European,’ presumably ‘premodern’ forms of oral performance became the basis of ‘modern-ist’ rebellion against the narrative regimes of (European) ‘modernity.’ In short, a closer look suggests that the dominant discursive figuration itself is overdetermined to the effect that both narrative and performance have functioned as signs of the modern and its other, virtually unraveling exclusive definitions of the modern/ist. Postmodernism (as theorized by the term’s various proponents) then complicated matters further, rather than bringing a simple victory of performance over narrative. 7 Whereas on the one hand, the modernist critique of representation was radicalized and metanarratives were programmatically replaced with “a discourse of fragments” and “an ideology of fracture” (Hassan 125), postmodernism has, on the other hand, also been characterized as reinjecting worldliness, or “historical actuality,” “figuration,” and “narrative” into modernist “formalist self-reflexivity.” 8 In epistemological terms, narrative simultaneously had a grand cultural entrance as a mode acknowledging the contingency, and constructed nature, of thought also in the ‘hard’ sciences (see Kreiswirth). This postmodernist interest in narrative as a tool of critical reflexivity vis-à-vis the comforts of ideological cohesion 9 doubtlessly coinduced the transdisciplinary spread of narratological approaches since the 1990s (e.g., see Herman, *Narratologies*), even if these new narratologies are today—as I will demonstrate in detail—more dominantly allied with a turn beyond postmodernist reflexivity paradigms.

Given these multiple and diverging, albeit intersecting, (re)appearances, it is impossible to tell a simple story of how narrative returned to master the performative excess of revolutionary, variously avant-garde–affiliated aesthetics. As the critical catchwords of narrative and performance have come to stand in for very different, sometimes contrary things, it rather seems that

7. Although hard to avoid altogether, these notions of periodization are consequently only moderately useful for conceptualizing aesthetic trends. Modernism and postmodernism do not only overlap (see also, e.g., Richardson, *Unnatural Voices* 137) but are also more appropriately discussed in terms of modernism’s and postmodernism’s with respect to the multifaceted, often divergent aesthetics associated with each of them.


9. See McHale, *Constructing* 4; Brockmeier and Carbaugh 3.
more than just one “narrative turn” (Kreiswirth) has coexisted and intersected with the performative turns that were initiated by earlier twentieth-century modernisms, and reiterated in both arts and theory across the humanities in the later decades of the twentieth century (see Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power*). At second glance, my introductory comparison between the aesthetics of *Week-end* and *Liebe Kannibalen Godard* becomes less clear-cut as well. Jonigk’s very choice of intertextual reference point indicates that German experimental theater of the 2000s—some of which will be discussed here, along with film and literature—is far from united in any definite move beyond performative excess. Following Godard’s filmic assemblage of cultural scraps quite closely over major parts of the evening, the production congenially adapts the film’s visual feast to the sparser means of the stage in a continued celebration of performative excess of various kinds. Thus, the audience is treated with onstage sex, a generous dose of theater blood, deafening gun shots, and plenty of smoke. Furthermore, the theatrical “Slapstick-Clownerie” (MN) makes ample use of performative self-reflexivity techniques, not only by having the cook comment on his own moralistic tone early on (Jonigk 2), but also by integrating the filmmaker, who is mentioned in the play’s title, as part of its own world. A playfully metaleptic interview scene, which is iconographically modeled after Godard’s later documentaries, invites the theatrical audience to reflect on the violence inscribed in—by extension also Bachmann’s own?—artistic production, as it opens with the filmmaker’s violent attempts to silence his characters and ends in him being shot by one of them.

Vice versa, *Week-end* itself remained multiply implicated in the production of the narrative it denounced (thus, e.g., Sontag, “Godard”). Even the closing title signifies, of course, ambiguously, as it pronounces narrative closure precisely in reiterating the avant-gardes’ famous call to the aesthetic weapons of antinarrativity. Albeit loose and fractured by spectacle, the film’s plot is quite classical in that it sends its protagonists on a journey that effects a reversal of conditions: from city to forest and ‘civilization’ to ‘barbarism.’ *Liebe Kannibalen Godard* is actually less narrative in that respect, as it has the cook appear already in its expository restaurant scene and reuses the dining motif in the concluding cannibalistic Last Supper feast. The narrative-generating opposition between civilization and barbarism seems to have become flattened into a diagnosis of virtual sameness. However, this diagnosis itself—which was, arguably, implied also in the ways *Week-end* linked its apparently antagonistic worlds by “the same principle of serial consumption” (Farocki, in Silverman and Farocki 109)—constitutes a different kind of narrativity, namely that of the ‘grand’ explanatory gesture creating a coherent world.
An Aesthetics of Narrative Performance

As indicated by the explicit surfacing of diverging definitions of ‘narrative’ and ‘performance’ in the preceding paragraphs, I will have to clarify my own story here by developing the notions at stake more explicitly. The rhetorical purpose of not doing so immediately was, quite simply, to underline this study’s point of departure: the bewildering critical proliferation and fuzziness of the narrative-vs.-performance opposition. This opposition’s diffuse and shifting contours, and the lack of analytical specificity promoted by its pervasive use in mainstream aesthetic and cultural theory throughout the last decades, have hampered critical conceptualizations of the aesthetics of modernist and contemporary art in different media, and the cultural work it performs. Arguing that we can best grasp the complex processes of imaginative world-making, identity formation, and critique in contemporary culture by studying the productive interplay, and overlap, of different narrative and performative forms, I outline an aesthetics of narrative performance. Through a comparative look at individual productions in three different media—film, theater (as live performance), and (print) literature (in the digital age)—I map a range of aesthetic configurations of narrative performance in contemporary culture. My use of the notion of aesthetics in this context is intended to function as a media-inclusive analogue to the (predominantly literature-associated) notion of poetics. That is, I employ it to designate a project of talking about form “as the particular fashioning of the elements, techniques and structure” of a particular work “in the service of a set of readerly engagements” (Phelan, Experiencing Fiction 3) and to the effect of coshaping those (both affective and semiotic) engagements, if not always in the way intended by the artist.

In many respects, I claim, the aesthetics of narrative performance receives its contours only in the plural form: as a configuration of quite different aes-

10. For early critiques of this opposition see, in particular, Maclean; Nelson, Freadman, and Anderson (as quoted in the epigraph on the first page of this chapter). The opposition’s fuzzy and shifting contours have contributed to its persistence often also beyond its explicit critique. However, even partial modifications of the binary are instrumental for my own undertaking—see, e.g., Taylor on the “rift,” but also the interaction between the “archive” and the “repertoire” (19), as well as recent work on the narratology of drama. Even while some of this research remains explicitly opposed to a narratology of performance (especially Jahn, “Narrative Voice”), contributions by Monika Fludernik (“Narrative and Drama”), Ansgar Nünning (Nünning and Sommer, “Diegetic and Mimetic Narrativity”; Nünning, “Mimesis des Erzählens”), and Brian Richardson (“Voice and Narration”) have also begun to transcend that dichotomy (for details, see below).

11. My use of the notion thus differs from those recent definitions that position aisthesis, as the doctrine of sensual perception (see, e.g., Krämer, Medium 270), against semiotic models of cultural analysis.
thetic techniques. One of the few things performance scholars seem to agree on is that performance is an “essentially contested concept.” The diagnosis implies that performance studies not only provides a plurality of definitions of its central term but, more fundamentally, is informed by conflicting, at least partially incompatible theoretical models (see Jackson 4). A number of scholars have also argued that we should refrain from the attempt to overcome this condition of essential contestation with yet another, be it an intentionally inclusive or an explicitly partisan definition, and instead embrace the concept’s “rival uses” as “of permanent potential critical value” to our own deployment of the notion. The same, I suggest, holds for narrative as well: the plurality of diverging, at times contradictory definitions provided by different scholars can be cleared up with a single definitional gesture only at the price of reducing productive complexity. Developing my own aesthetic theorizing in a historicizing vein, I therefore begin by delineating, in the following parts of this introductory chapter, some of the competing concepts of narrative and performance with their different foci, implied epistemological claims, and aesthetic politics.

As this overview demonstrates, diverging definitions of both narrative and performance align some of their respective uses more closely with each other than with alternative definitions of the same concept. The ‘essentially contested’ nature of performance appears perhaps most strikingly in the ways in which performance theories have shown the “tendency to inhabit the essentialist as well as the antinessentialist side of any conceptual binary” (Jackson 37). Alternatively participating in the “language” of the “authentic” as well as that of “theatre’s fakery,” performance has served to “ground the ‘real’” in a production of presence, but also as a metaphor for the vicissitudes of representation (14, 37). Similarly, narrative has been defined both through the criterion of mediation (diegesis, as opposed to mimesis) and as a mode of mimetic world-making that renders mediation invisible. Building on these conceptual differentiations, I begin by defining, for my own purposes, not narrative or performance as such but two clusters of techniques of narrative performance. From the angle of narratology, we can, as I will explain in detail, distinguish scenic (highly ‘mimetic,’ presumably immediate) narrative and theatricalized narrative (narrative that dramatizes the process of narrative mediation); from the angle of performance studies techniques of (narrative) ‘presencing,’ or presentification, and (narrative) theatricalization, whereby the brackets aim to account for the strength of antinarrative motifs in performance studies. In this

13. Strine, Long, and Hopkins (referencing W. B. Gallie); to similar effect see Reinelt (“The Politics of Discourse”).
way, I draw on the conceptual richness built into the architecture of theoretical conflict in order to articulate a more flexible aesthetics: a set of conceptual tools specific enough to allow fine-tuning interpretations beyond standard recipes while also heterogeneous and inclusive enough to facilitate adequate, multifaceted responses to very different works. Thus specifying techniques of narrative performance, I argue, helps unravel the apparently contradictory moves interwoven not only in Godard’s film and Bachmann’s production. Moving beyond the dichotomy of ‘identical-critical performance vs. identity-building narrative,’ and eventually also beyond the associated vocabularies of ‘subversion vs. affirmation’ as such, this aesthetic specification allows me to develop a complex, but simultaneously clear, understanding of the cultural work that contemporary novels, films, and theater productions undertake in critically producing affect and meaning.

Without compromising my commitment to complexity, however, I will also develop two layers of argumentation in which the concept of narrative performance gains some contours in the singular form. The first of these two layers unfolds primarily on epistemological terrain, that is, on a general level of discussion that is ultimately not at the center of my interest in this study but nonetheless grounds its intervention. It is on this level that readers may be familiar with my title notion of narrative performance, as it marks the conceptual point at which the narrative-vs.-performance dichotomy has in fact been undone from the angle of narrative theory. Although my review of narratological discourses will demonstrate that (in part even recent) narrative theory has had its role in developing this critical dichotomy, the ‘performative turn’ across the humanities has also left its imprint. In recent decades, scholars from otherwise diverging narratological camps—including rhetorical and reader response criticism, deconstruction, socionarratology, anthropology, and cognitive theory—have insisted on the dimension of narrative practice (e.g., Herman, *Story Logic* 23), the “action” of telling (Phelan, *Narrative as Rhetoric* 4) and the *Act of Reading* (Iser). In effect, most narratologists would probably agree today that “narrative is performance” (Jacobs, “Preface,”

14. For a similar call to flexibility see Richardson, *Unnatural Voices* 10. My methodology thus remains informed by the metacritical reflections on knowledge formation we associate with postmodernism. Rather than in deconstruction as such, however, I am interested in the productive function of the outlined theoretical turbulences for developing better accounts of aesthetic forms and their cultural implications. Instead of substituting the categories of narratology—or performance theory—with new notions (see Gibson, *Towards* 15, for the context of narratology), I build on the variety of available concepts and terminologies, balancing context-sensitive formalism (Meister, Kindt, and Schernus, “Narratology” xv–xvi) with form-sensitive contextualism (my rewording of the methodology suggested by Mieke Bal in “Close Reading Today,” 23).
x), that is, always (also) a performative act in John L. Austin’s sense of an act ‘effecting’ an action (6–7), and perhaps even that narrativity is based on (felicitous) performativity (Rudrum). In this context, the notion of narrative performance has been specifically established as a designation for the act of narrating (see already Labov and Waletzky 31). As indicated above, my own intervention seeks to move beyond this structural inclusion of performance into the architecture of narratology by turning the notion into a vehicle of aesthetic specification. Thus, my readings focus on techniques that actively unfold the general condition of narrative’s performativity—and, vice versa, the narrative dimension of performance. From the angle of narrative theory, I am, then, interested in developing the analysis of narrative practice—or the act of narration—in terms of how it produces specific forms of narrative performance. Nonetheless, this work of specification builds on existing conceptualizations of the necessary epistemological and structural implications of narrative and performance. For my own purposes, I further develop these implications in the following critical discussion of diverging notions of narrative and performance. Challenging, in particular, the pronounced antinarrative gestures of phenomenological and deconstructive performance theories, I demonstrate that even according to their own (if polemically backgrounded) epistemological concessions, performance can be defined as narrative performance through the necessary interplay of de- and recontextualization in the process of configuration that characterizes communication principally in and through all media.

While I thus forcefully assert the overlap between narrative and performance even on the level of general theoretical conceptualization, I argue that this overlap develops a specific significance for the context of modern and contemporary—by which I mean turn of the twenty-first century—aesthetic theories and practices. Contemporary literature, film, and theater are best mapped through an aesthetics of narrative performance also on the historical grounds that here, the performative legacies of European modernism and postmodernism intersect with ongoing—African diaspora, feminist, postmodern, and ‘beyond postmodernism’—returns to narrative. As developed at this intersection, the aesthetics of narrative performance is an aesthetics of the contemporary moment. Notably, it variously draws on earlier forms: rather than as something radically new, it unfolds in the intricate ways in which (even ancient) forms continue to be reworked and reconfigured. Some of these lines of influence have been highlighted in those existing narratology-

15. The same does not hold vice versa: performance scholars have been less inclined to consider the ways in which performance may necessarily have a narrative dimension as well.
cal contributions that have moved beyond the epistemological and structural layers of conceptualizing narrative performance toward questions of aesthetics. Drawing on sociolinguistic approaches, on the one hand, and media-theoretical investigations of orality, on the other, Irene Kacandes’s *Talk Fiction*, for example, has transposed discussions of orally inflected forms of narrative in premodern cultures into the contemporary context. Starting from Walter Ong’s concept of “secondary orality” and Erving Goffman’s interaction analysis, Kacandes conceptualizes a postmodern poetics of literary addressivity primarily based on (what I call) techniques of theatricalized narration.16 As acknowledged by Kacandes (36), the ‘talking book’ is, of course, also a trope prominently developed in African diaspora literary theory. More generally, work from the latter field, prominently including Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s classic *The Signifying Monkey*, has equally developed important building blocks for my project. In response to the association of African and African diaspora cultures with orality, scholars working on these cultures have taken the aesthetics of narrative performance beyond its presumably marginal sites, underlining the ways in which European modernisms drew on the aesthetics of non-European cultures—most radically to the effect of rewriting the ‘big story’ of twentieth-century modernity as the “story of black innovation and white imitation” (Mercer, “Diaspora Aesthetics” 146; see also Taylor 10).

Against the background of these connections, my study positions the aesthetics of narrative performance in contemporary culture as the product of transnational modernisms and postmodernisms. Along these vectors, its distinctive shape has been modeled by dominant twentieth-century cultural concerns. In this context, I argue that the aesthetics of narrative performance receives its contours in the singular form in a second respect, which indicates the critical gravity center also of my own intervention. Although widely divergent in their effects, most of the techniques I subsume under the label of the aesthetics of narrative performance have been significantly associated with modernist, and postmodernist, challenges to narrative authority and coherence. My careful wording seeks to underline that this association does not translate into a straightforward claim such as ‘the aesthetics of narrative performance undoes, or forfeits, (even certain forms of) narrative authority and coherence.’ Rather, the contemporary aesthetics of narrative performance finds its identity as a multifaceted response to the fact that narrative author-

16. Kacandes explicitly uses the concept of performance for one of her modes of literary talk, namely that of apostrophe. Indirectly, however, apostrophe comes to stand in for ‘talk fiction’ overall, in that its “duplicitous address” dramatizes the necessarily fictive dimension of ‘talk’ in literature (147, 145). On the literary impact of orality see also Fludernik’s *Towards; Maclean; Nelson, Freadman, and Anderson.*
ity and coherence cannot be taken for granted, or ‘innocently’ reasserted, any longer. In its multifacetedness, it includes techniques, and configurations of techniques, that primarily effect the deconstruction, or critical complication, of authority claims, as well as others that creatively develop various alternative forms of narrative power and connection. Imaginatively, the aesthetics of narrative performance explores the redistribution of narrative authority across our complex sociosymbolic maps of the contemporary world, variously authorizing (very different) marginalized voices, insisting on the impossibility of clearly distinguishing between marginalized and hegemonic articulations, or ‘simply’ searching for new legitimations of narrative world-making. In what follows, I spell out these claims in more detail. In a first step, I back them up with a fuller discussion of existing concepts of narrative and performance, as well as adjacent notions such as representation and mimesis.

Narratological Drama

In his canonical *Narrative Discourse*, Gérard Genette set out by distinguishing “three distinct” ways in which the notion of “narrative” has been used. One of these, namely, the notion of “the event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of narrating” (26) is the basis for the narratological concepts of narrative performance discussed in the previous section. The other two, however, lead us onto terrain where narratologists have, sometimes vigorously, participated in constructing the critical dichotomy of narrative vs. performance. In a spirit of playful provocation, the story of classical narratology—and to a lesser degree even contemporary narratologies—can thus be cast as a story in which the hero, “narrative,” is characterized through his conflictual encounters with his antagonist “performance” in her various guises, including those of “mimesis,” “spectacle,” etc. Genette’s first definition of narrative, which is at the center of his own project, along with that of the German narratological tradition from Käte Friedemann to Franz Karl Stanzel, has the notion refer to “the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse” (25) representing an event, or a series of events. Genette conceptually unfolds this notion by going back to the ancient distinction between diegesis and mimesis. As quoted by Genette, Plato distinguished “pure narrative,” where “the poet himself” is speaking, from where he speaks through a character, which is “properly” called “imitation, or mimesis” (*Narrative Discourse* 162; italics in original). Following this asymmetrical distinction, Genette essentially conceptualizes narrative through its diegetic “mode” and, in fact, insists on “the truly insurmountable opposition between dramatic representation and
toward an aesthetics of narrative performance

Not surprisingly, this rhetorical forcefulness masks precisely the opposition’s instability. As Genette himself notes, Plato’s foundational distinction was one between “two narrative modes” (Genette, Narrative Discourse 162; see Plato 79–81). Genette turns one of them into narrative’s ‘other’ by foregrounding Plato’s language of hybridity: metaphorically highlighting the essential difference between poetological ‘species,’ he insists on diegetic ‘purity,’ as opposed to “everything that creeps into narrative along with dialogue, thereby making narrative impure—that is, mixed” (Genette, Revisited 18, italics in original). But even while his presentation tries to fend off these ‘alien’ invasions, Genette knows that the described hybridity constitutes a virtually insurmountable condition: “[N]arrative is almost always a mixed genre” (ibid., 42).

If this is true in general (Plato himself pointed to the in-between status of epic poetry, 81), the condition of ‘hybridity’ is intensified in modern(ist) poetics, where experimentation with dramatic dialogue has been pushed “to its extreme” (Genette, Narrative Discourse 173). With reference to Percy Lubbock’s terminology, Wayne Booth analyzed this modern tradition of developing narrative as an art of “showing” and consequently underlined the “radical inadequacy of the telling–showing distinction” already in The Rhetoric of Fiction (16). Through the increasing dominance of free indirect forms as well as (often untagged) direct dialogue and autonomous monologue (see Cohn, Transparent Minds), much modernist literature from Henry James and Virginia Woolf to Zora Neale Hurston and James Baldwin reduced the visibility of diegetic mediation, staging, as Booth summarized, the “exit” of the narrator (he actually uses the word “author,” 271). The forms thus developed have been variously called “scenic” (Otto Ludwig; Henry James), “cinematic” (e.g., Chatman, Story and Discourse 75), “oral” or “orally inflected” (e.g., Gates), simply “dramatic,” or, more recently, “performative.” For my own project of specifying different forms of performative narration, I use the notion of “scenic” narrative for this cluster of techniques approaching immediacy of presentation.

17. Similarly, Stanzel defines “mediacy of presentation as the generic characteristic of narration,” which distinguishes it from “the direct form, drama” (A Theory 4), although he also emphasizes different degrees of narrator audibility on a diegesis–mimesis scale.

18. In modern racial theory, the ‘hybrid’ was the result of interbreeding between ‘species’ considered too different to be mixed successfully (see Robert Young, first 6–9). Genette explicitly refutes the translation “simple” instead of “pure,” which is given also in my Plato edition (79). See, similarly, Stanzel on dialogue as, “[s]trictly speaking,” a “foreign body in the narrative genre” (A Theory 65–66).

19. Ibid., 199; see also Chatman, Story and Discourse 74; Coming to Terms 115–16; Stanzel 19.

20. For example, Bucher; Schumacher; Hempfer. Another related category is that of the “spatial” form of modernist novels (Smitten and Daghistany).
presentation, as it more appropriately resonates across media boundaries than "dramatic" or "cinematic" and carries less media-theoretical and epistemological baggage than "oral" or "mimetic."

Importantly, most twentieth-century performance theorists would not agree to the approximation of mimesis and performance implied here, and this conceptual fork will be carefully attended to in my study. Plato scholarship, however, has insisted that in the ancient Greek context, his suspicion of mimesis was directed at the implications of oral performance associated with drama at the dawn of literary hegemony (see Havelock; also Potolsky 20–21, 72–73). The motif of media competition thus implied in the mimesis-vs.-diegesis opposition is actualized also by Genette when he unfolds his antimimetic argument in media-theoretical terms: "[I]n contrast to dramatic representation" (read: 'visual performance'), he asserts,

no narrative can 'show' or 'imitate' the story it tells. All it can do is tell it in a manner which is detailed, precise, 'alive,' and in that way give more or less the illusion of mimesis—which is the only narrative mimesis, for this single and sufficient reason: that narrative, oral or written, is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating. (Narrative Discourse 164)\(^{21}\)

The theoretical affect underlying Genette's insistence can be understood in the context of the emerging poststructuralisms of his time: his narratology critically exposes the realist, or immediacy, pretenses of scenic modernisms. As much as he tries, Genette insists, Booth's "author" cannot simply exit: the "main point of Narrative Discourse . . . reflects the assumption that there is an enunciating instance—the narrating—with its narrator and its narratee, fictive or not, represented or not, silent or chatty, but always present in what is indeed for me, I fear, an act of communication" (Revisited 101). Consequently, Genette analyzes the narrative mode of "showing" as a set of techniques that generate—in Barthes's terminology—a "reality effect" (Revisited 46).\(^{22}\) But if Genette's insistence on enunciation aligns his argument with contemporary critiques of 'mimetic' concepts of representation—or concepts of representation understood as reproduction of a prior presence\(^{23}\)—the irony is that his

\(^{21}\) Unless, Genette adds, the object narrated itself is language (Narrative Discourse, 164). But even then, he later insists, it is not imitated but "transcribed" (see Revisited 43). Alternative—media-inclusive—contemporary definitions of narrative, e.g., by Roland Barthes, did not greatly influence the subsequent development of classical narratology (see Ryan, "On the Theoretical Foundations" 1; Herman, "Introduction" [2007] 5).

\(^{22}\) Barthes himself also insists on the antinarrative nature of this effect, contrasting the "insignificant" forms of notation and description with the predicative structure of narration ("The Reality Effect" 142–43).

\(^{23}\) See Ricoeur, Time and Narrative 1, 45 on Platonic mimesis; Rimmon-Kenan, A Glance 7.
media-ontological articulation of the argument exclusively for language as the basis of literary narrative also aligns it with more recent turns against postmodernist critiques of representation. Whereas in the 1970s Christian Metz discussed *Film Language*, Gregory Currie’s cognitive film theory in the 1990s reintroduced the claim that “certain media,” including theater and film, belong “to something like a natural kind” because they signify iconically rather than conventionally (2, 197).

We can begin to disentangle the epistemological, media-theoretical, and aesthetic layers of argumentation mixed up in these divergent media purisms by recalling that the early German narratologist Käte Friedemann described “the mediacy of narration” as “sort of an analogue to our experience of reality in general” (Stanzel 4), that is, an analogue of the (post-)Kantian epistemological insight that we grasp the world through the medium of an “observing mind” (“betrachtenden Geistes”; Friedemann 26). Unless we intend to completely discard this modern perspectivist stance, questions of enunciation cannot be restricted to literature. Perception in and through all media is necessarily embedded in an act of communication in Genette’s sense, even where we are—as Metz soon specified for film—not dealing with linguistic forms of utterance in a narrow sense (“On the Notion”); and this is doubly true for the perception of artworks as operating in a socially framed sphere of rhetorical design and presentation. While the difference made by the use of iconic vs. linguistic signs in specific works deserves detailed consideration, it should not be overdrawn (e.g., see Currie xvii) to the degree where it overshadows the unnatural—both conventionalized and actively creative—uses of iconic signs in the composition, selection, and arrangement of film images or theatrical poses. On this general level, then, film and theater performances are always composed by acts of narration as well, even while the instance of narration does not usually come in a unified, anthropomorphized form. The arguably more interesting question, however—which is at the center of the following

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24. In his more complex alternative mapping of cognitive film theory, Noël Carroll discusses such “medium specificity talk” (1) in terms of legitimation strategies, which “[m]ost often . . . turn out to be . . . briefs in favor of certain styles, genres and artistic movements” (19).

25. In the respective film studies controversy, Bordwell insisted that film has no narrator, instead locating the process of narration in the spectator’s act of performing coherence (*Narration* 62). While this emphasis on spectator activity is welcome, Chatman has objected that there is no need to forgo specification also on the side of composition, that is, in Bordwell’s own words, “the organization of a set of cues” that solicit spectator activity (ibid.; Chatman, *Coming to Terms* 126). As a process of communication, film does have narrational agency on the level of “transmission” (132–33), or a number of instances who “manage the exposition” (Jahn, “Narrative Voice” 670)—including but not limited to the camera. Bordwell’s more recent *Poetics of Cinema* moves toward the composition side as well, if by underlining the role of the “filmmakers” (see 121–33).
readings—is the question in which ways this act of narration is made aesthetically visible, or invisible, in any work in any medium, through (the absence of) a narrating figure or other techniques marking mediation (see Chatman, *Coming to Terms*; Grünzweig and Solbach 6).

Back on the epistemological level, insisting that a production in any medium is never just an act of mimesis in the sense of reproducing a prior presence does not yet imply subscribing to Genette’s full-fledged antimimetic stance. More recent scholarship has recuperated the concept of mimesis by incorporating post/modernist critiques of representation into the notion. Rather than drawing on Plato’s notion of mimesis as an attempt to copy the world (which is doomed to failure already in Plato, see 325–35), these recuperations rely primarily on Aristotle. With Aristotle, mimesis has been conceptualized as an active process of (re)configuration, which includes a moment of “break” with “preexisting reality” (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative I* 45), or even, in more “radically constructivist terms,” as an “artificial and illusionary projection of a semiotic structure, which the reader recuperates in terms of a fictional reality,” in short: “performance” in Austin’s speech-act theoretical sense.  

For my own work, thus conceptualizing mimesis as a process of active reconfiguration coshaped by available sociosymbolic scripts is crucial in that it allows for moving beyond antirepresentational post/structuralist purism (see Herman, *Story Logic* 4) without sacrificing the productive aspects of later twentieth-century critiques of representation. In this sense, not only visual media but also literary narratives include a “mimetic component” (Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction* 5) as their productive figurations tend to somehow grapple with histories and experiences, even if those histories and experiences can (in epistemological terms) never be immediately represented in any work, and (in aesthetic terms) find their way into these works variously by virtue of an artist’s interest in or defiance vis-à-vis the laws and issues of the outside world.

The return to mimesis within narrative theory opens onto the other narratological plot to be discussed here. In its background, we can locate the tradition summarized in Genette’s second (and, in my presentation context here, last) definition of narrative as the “succession of events” itself, that


27. To avoid misunderstandings, let me underline that my compromise formula differs significantly from the ways in which phenomenological and cognitive theorists have, despite their general commitment to different degrees of constructivism, reintroduced an “ontological presupposition of reference” or “referential or ‘vertical’ conception of meaning” in stark opposition to twentieth-century linguistics (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative I*, 78; Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* 91–92).
is, the “story” or “narrative content” (*Narrative Discourse*, 25, 27; italics in original). Within this tradition, “minimal,” “temporal,” and “causal” definitions of narrative have competed (see Richardson, “Recent Concepts” 169), but whatever the details of the criterion, they share a focus on the connection of events. The philosophical implications of this motif were developed by Paul Ricoeur, whose phenomenological discussion influenced more recent cognitive approaches. For Ricoeur, narrative is a “work of synthesis” through which “poetic composition” refigures “our confused, unformed . . . temporal experience,” or the art of “making discordance appear concordant” (*Time and Narrative* I, ix, xi, 43). While Ricoeur’s analysis is still focused on the (Aristotelian) notion of plot, or “muthos” as the “organization of events” (33), cognitive narratologists have partially displaced the central status of plot in favor of more inclusive concepts of narrative “world” and “experientiality.”

In direct contrast to the definition of narrative in Genette and Stanzel, this scholarship “roughly equate[s] mimetic with narrative texts,” defining the “mimetic text” as one “devoted to the representation of states of affairs involving individual existents situated in time and space, as opposed to those texts that deal exclusively with universals, abstract ideas, and atemporal categories.”

Also in contrast to Genette, the cognitive narratologies of the 2000s have been emphatically developed as intermedial approaches. In response to the literary bias of classical narratology, Marie-Laure Ryan suggests making optional “the prefix *re*” in definitions of narrative as “*the representation of an event or a series of events*”: Narrativity is to be found in the mimetic presentation (and audience reconstruction) of consciousness or events through “a certain type of mental image.” As recent approaches thus locate the “transmedial identity” of narrative “on the side of the signified” and background the level of discourse or mediation in folding the mimesis-vs.-diegesis distinction,

28. For example, Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*; Fludernik, *Towards*; specifically (Ryan) 244–46 vs. (Fludernik) 13; see 27 on their disagreement regarding the significance of plot. Drawing on both (as well as Jerome Bruner), Herman integrates the traditional plot criterion of “disruption” in a “storyworld” with the need for “human-like agents” and the conveying of “the experience of living through this storyworld in flux” (*Basic Elements of Narrative* xvi; italics in original).


30. “On the Theoretical Foundations” 4 (with Abbott), Ryan’s emphasis.

31. Ibid. This does not mean that mediation is entirely disregarded here. While Herman defines “stories” as the “blending of (certain kinds of) semiotic structures with (certain kinds of) cognitive resources” (“Introduction” [2003], 11), Ryan’s compromise formula defines narrative as both “textual act of representation” and “cognitive construct” built by the interpreter (“Introduction” 9). The emphasis in these definitions, however, is quite contrary to that in Genette or Stanzel.
it would seem that the narrative-vs.-performance confrontation has run its course. In fact, already Mieke Bal (see Narratology 9) and Seymour Chatman had argued for the inclusion of drama within narratology based on the shared story component (Coming to Terms 109). Now Monika Fludernik’s Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology made the point based on its portrayal of human experience (333, 49; see also 26), and since then, new narratological work on drama has begun to give more sustained “attention” to “the site” where “narrative” and “performance” are “fused.”32 Beyond drama (or the theater text)33 as a genre, David Herman has even posed the intriguing question of whether his own notion of narrativity is slanted toward modern (read: ‘dramatic’) narrative in that it privileges the “first-person character” of experience vis-à-vis the “third-person” terms afforded by scientific discourse; underlining how narrative “[e]nact[s] and not just represent[s] ways of experiencing” (Basic Elements 146, 157; see 138, 140).34

Dramatic narrative, however, does not yet equal performance. In some places, the narrative-vs.-drama dichotomy has been replaced by the (still curiously Genettean) opposition between text and performance.35 Even Ryan’s Narrative Across Media falls short of fully implementing her emphatically intermedial commitment when she surprisingly continues to assert that “narrative has a medium of choice, and this medium is language” (“Introduction” 13). The hierarchical operations at play here can be explained by going back, once more, to Aristotle’s conception of mimesis. As critics have suggested, Aristotle defended mimesis against Plato by “taking it out of the theatre,” that is, by excluding “spectacle” as the performative element of dramatic art (Potolsky 73; see Aristotle 51, 53–55, 75). Similarly, phenomenological and cognitive

32. Richardson, “Voice and Narration” 690; see also Fludernik, “Narrative and Drama”; Jahn, “Narrative Voice”; Nünning and Sommer, “Die Entwicklung.” Beyond the early attention to plot, also the “discourse level of drama” has now come under investigation as variably developed through diegetic and/or mimetic means (Fludernik, “Narrative and Drama” 361; Nünning and Sommer, “Diegetic and Mimetic Narrativity” 332; Rabinowitz analogously on music in opera: “Music”).

33. In the tradition of Peter Szondi’s Theorie des modernen Dramas, German theory tends to reserve the notion of drama for the plot-driven, programmatically nontheatricalized form of bourgeois ‘fourth wall’ theater.

34. Nonetheless, drama continues to metaphorically figure as an “Emu” rather than a prototypical bird in the new concepts of narrative based on “membership gradience” (Herman, “Introduction” [2007] 8, quoting Lakoff): Herman’s Cambridge Companion to Narrative includes drama, along with film and new media, in a section on “Other Narrative Media” following a detailed introduction to “Narrative Fiction.” Even Fludernik’s recent Erzähltheorie only hesitantly acknowledges the inclusion of (film and) drama (13; see 15).

35. See Jahn, “Narrative Voice” 675, 662; less categorically Fludernik, “Narrative and Drama” 358, 378.
critics have been struggling with the ways in which performance functions ‘in excess of’ mimetic world evocation. Once more layering epistemological, media-ontological, and aesthetic argumentations, they have located this performative excess both on the screen or theater stage (as the excess of the nonlinguistic) and in the literary—dramatic or other—text itself (as an excess of form over realist world configuration). For Ryan, language—and thus literature—is “the native tongue of narrative,” because in order to qualify as narrative, a “text must allow the reconstruction of an interpretative network of goals, plans, causal relations, and psychological motivations,” which provides “the narrated events” with “coherence and intelligibility.” While Ryan thus describes “dramatic structure” in the Aristotelian sense of plot as “the fullest form of narrativity” (Narrative as Virtual Reality 246), Fludernik ascribes “low degree narrativity” to “action-oriented spectacle with little focusing on a central character” (Towards 353). In that sense, it is classical (for Ryan) or modern consciousness dramas (for Fludernik) that become narrative ‘proper’ here. However, these narratological delineations no longer take the form of fervent exclusion they had in Genette. Explicitly interested in experimental, provocatively “anti-mimetic” texts, Fludernik strives to incorporate them by emphasizing readers’ recuperation efforts. If “natural” narratology, nonetheless, finds its limits at the point where “overall textual coherence” is “at risk” (317), the growing interest in “Unnatural Narratology” has stepped in, continuing the exploration of both experimental fiction and “postdramatic” (Lehmann) theater work.

In part, the challenges to coherence building at stake here are created by radically scenic forms, for example, contemporary fiction’s broader-scale experiments with concurrent narration, which sacrifice overview, potentially turning the act of narration into a verbalizing of “the (unconfigured) particulars of the visualized spectacles ostensibly passing before” the narrator’s eyes.

36. Ricoeur echoes Aristotle in underlining that “spectacle” is not essential to tragedy (Time and Narrative I, 36).
37. “Introduction” 11, 9. Visual media, Ryan argues, “lack the code, the grammar, and the syntactic rules necessary to articulate specific meanings” and thus to “convey possibility, conditionality,” or “causality” (10–11). However, Ryan herself complicates this picture by acknowledging that most literary texts do not make causality explicit, while filmic editing conventions allow the viewer to infer causal connections (ibid.).
38. See Towards 35, 313; also Nünning’s discussion of metanarrativity in terms of ‘second degree mimesis’ (“Mimesis” 22).
40. Fleischman 11; see Margolin 151. Vis-à-vis these challenges, some critics have continued to insist on a retrospective viewpoint or even the past tense as a mandatory condition of narrativity (Fleischman 11; see 23, 6, 10; Martinez—with reference to Arthur Danto—121,
Cognitive narratology’s biggest integration challenge, however, is a second cluster of performative techniques. In passing, these forms surface also in Genette’s *Narrative Discourse*, when he comments on how his main literary example, Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*, in a “decisive transgression” of “the millennial opposition between mimesis and diegesis,” combines its practices of ‘showing’ with “the presence of a narrator”: “utmost immediacy” meets “[e]xtreme mediation” (168–69, 210). More fully, these techniques of highlighting mediation were conceptualized by Booth as the ‘dramatizing’ of the narrative process, specifically in those modernist forms that answered scenic poetics with a rediscovery of aesthetic distance, culminating, for example, in Kacandes’s ‘talk fiction’ and more generally in postmodernism’s playful emphasis on “metanarrative” commentary.41 Potentially leading to the deconstruction of tellers and characters, such contemporary literature makes “the play of the narration” into a “significant drama in its own right” (Richardson, *Unnatural Voices* 135). As Eco put it through a late modernist example, “narrative becomes very similar to theatre” when Thomas Mann (thus Eco) says “I,” and this “I” does not designate (the flesh-and-blood or implied author) Thomas Mann, but Serenus Zeitbloom (116). With the implicit performative statement “I am Serenus,” the novel duplicates the speech act, thereby preventing words from functioning as transparent signs and instead highlighting the process of their configuration. Although principally a condition of all fiction (Eco 116), narrative’s virtual affiliation with theater is aesthetically developed

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41. Fludernik, *Erzähltheorie* 75; Fludernik, *Towards* 271, 314; Ryan, “On the Theoretical Foundations” 6. Ambivalence also vis-à-vis modernism is most pronounced in Ricoeur (*Time and Narrative* 2, e.g., 8, 22).

42. With reference to the ongoing narratological controversies on the matter (see, most recently, the spring 2011 issue of Style; also Kindt and Müller; Phelan, *Living to Tell* 38–49), I prefer to see the existence of the implied author as less a matter of belief—and theology in theory—than simply of terminological decisions and methodological emphasis. I do find the notion—or a more explicitly constructivist equivalent such as (projected, dynamic) “author image” (thus Herman and Vervaeck 12)—helpful for designating the (personified, but human rather than godlike) instance to which we attribute responsibility for the overall design of the text. While the terminological choice admittedly implies a “loosely intentionalist” approach (Lanser, “The Implied Author” 155), this instance is different not only from the narrative agents directly speaking (or, in the case of film, framing, etc.) but also from the flesh-and-blood author in that its contours emerge only from the “feedback loop among authorial agency, textual phenomena (including intertextual relations), and reader-response” (Phelan, *Living to Tell* 18). In other words, my plea for granting agency to both authors and readers in the process of constructing meaning situates my approach between their respective defenders (see Phelan, ibid.; as well as Rabinowitz, “‘The Absence,’” vs. Herman and Vervaeck).
in Mann’s foregrounding of a narrator persona “as a performative figure in the configuration of narrative.”

Following Eco’s cursory remarks, I use the notion of theatricalization for the cluster of performative techniques that highlight narrative mediation. In this case, the traditional narratological concept—Booth’s notion of dramatization—is not only confusing because of the term’s alternative usage for the reduction of distance but also limiting because of the association of ‘drama’ with ‘literature.’ Since “theatricalized” arguably has stronger implications of play than “dramatized,” however, I hasten to underline that the theatricalization of narrative is a matter of both degree and specific technique. While Booth suggests that dramatization occurs “as soon as” the narrator “refers to himself as ‘I’” (152), a single such “I” does not yet amount to very much theatricalization (while at the same time, it is not the only available technique of theatricalization even in literature). However, theatricalization becomes more pronounced where such an “I” designates—for example, in character narration as an “art of indirection” (Phelan, Living to Tell 1)—a narrator “radically different from the implied author” of the text (Booth 152). Here, theatricalization develops a range of possibilities for ironic, bivocal, and other forms of indirect representation that actively question, and reconfigure, narrative authority. Importantly, this pronounced function of contemporary theatricality cannot be taken for granted. Historically, Susan Lanser demonstrates, the narrator’s overtness has been used as a means precisely of making strong claims to authority (if especially in heterodiegetic forms, Fictions of Authority 17). Today, the legacy of post/modernist authority critique presents a forceful backdrop for arguably all of theatricalization’s uses, but this still does not translate into a guaranteed antiauthoritative bent. The relationships between poetic technique and political effect need to be individually untangled through text analysis.

As indicated here, my initial replacement of the narrative-vs.-performance dichotomy with a distinction between two clusters of narrative performance techniques is too simple to capture the multiplicity, and multifacetedness, of individual aesthetic procedures. Pace Genette, scenic and theatricalized narrative also do not form a neat opposition; their regular coexistence in individual works attests to the limits of narratological system-building in the complex field of aesthetic theory and practice. While the opposition between immediacy and linguistic mediation is constitutive of the modern episteme in Foucault’s sense, which sharply contrasts physical ‘nature’ and ‘authenticity’ with language and ‘theatrical’ rhetoricity, aesthetic modernisms have equally, and

43. Williams, Theory and the Novel 26, in different context.
often simultaneously, invested in both. The respective overdetermination of the term performance—to which I attend in detail in the following section—is indicative of these double allegiances, while simultaneously pointing to the ways in which contemporary aesthetic theory and practice have challenged, if not fully overcome, this modern episteme. Individual narrative features—like orality and the present tense—are associated with both scenic and theatricalized narrative, and the two directly overlap where, for example, character narration presents “self-dramatization” through commentary in the form of direct thought report or interior monologue (see Fludernik, *Towards* 292). My readings explore how different scenic and theatricalizing forms are configured in a variety of relationships—from conflict to harmonious parallel and interplay—in contemporary aesthetic works. Nonetheless, I hold on to my initial distinction as a heuristically useful one—not only for analyzing theoretical controversies, but also as a first step in mapping the complex aesthetics of narrative performance with more specificity than provided by previous scholarship in the name of the performative.

Finally, I do not intend to suggest that between the scenic and the theatricalized, all narrative forms are equally performative. Rather, there is a relatively nonperformative area ‘between’ (or, given the limits of theoretical mapping, ‘beside’) these only partially opposite forms. Specific combinations of narrative distancing techniques—for example, the use of the past tense—with an untheatricalized act of narration work to erase a sense of narrative’s performative character to authoritative effect, projecting order and coherence. Perhaps, this ideal of nonperformative narration is best captured by Hayden White’s classical historiographic definition. In contrast to scenic forms, White’s narrative (in the narrow sense) arranges events chronologically from a historical distance to the effect of establishing authority and morality; in contrast to theatricalized forms (and, notably, in direct opposition to diegesis-based concepts), it is defined as the very mode of representation that makes representation invisible, or erases the “performative index” of speaking (Stempel 327), as it “feigns to make the world . . . speak itself as a story.”44 The aesthetic contours of such narration have perhaps been most extensively developed for the medium of film, namely as those of Classical Hollywood Cinema. As Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson outline in the volume thus titled, this cinema’s narration operates covertly, as “narration-through-character-interaction,” or character-centered causality and “seamless editing” (30, 13, 24). Although generally omniscient, it does not usually flaunt its omniscience (e.g., through

44. White opposes narrative to ‘discourse’ as an explicitly perspectivized form (“Narrativity” 2).
authoritative voice-overs) and is at best “moderately self-conscious” at defined moments, namely in the film’s exposition (25–27).

This example of ‘Classical Hollywood Cinema,’ however, is instructive not least because film scholars have argued that upon closer investigation, it turns out to be a conceptual abstraction more than actual cinematic reality. Not only is this ‘classical form’ multiply circumscribed in geohistorical terms, as it receives its contours only against the ‘preclassical’ and ‘postclassical’ cinema of ‘attractions’ (Gunning; see below) and against the challenges of auteurism and avant-garde production. Even the concept’s proponents also acknowledge that ‘Classical Hollywood Cinema’ is rather heterogeneous in itself; for example, the rules of causally tight, covert narration are regularly transgressed in a number of genres (including musical, comedy, melodrama). Taking the critique further, Geoff King questioned the very concept of relatively nonperformative narration by arguing that “throughout” all of cinema history, “narrative and spectacle have existed in a series of shifting relationships in which neither has been entirely absent” (3; see also Elsaesser, “Discipline” 216). A similar case can be made for literature. While premodern forms of narrative from various cultural contexts have been multiply associated with performativity (e.g., P. Johnson; Fleischman), the European canon was dominated by theatricalized narrators also throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and, despite the intensification of Antitheatrical Prejudice (Barish), to some degree into nineteenth-century romanticism and even realism. Simultaneously, scenic forms began to take shape with the development of internal focalization, as well as realism’s own calls for “objective,” “impersonal,” and explicitly “scenic” narrative. Even to the degree that the realist novel still emerged as programmatically nonperformative, its failure to altogether escape the theater is indicated by the fact that Adorno later compared it to the illusionist bourgeois theater of the ‘fourth wall’ (33). As we have seen, twentieth-century modernisms and postmodernisms radicalized scenic forms while also bringing the return of theatricalized narration. In the sign of overlapping performative and narrative turns, the aesthetics of narrative performance finds a particularly rich development as that of the contemporary moment, continuously inflected by modernisms and postmodernisms even in moving beyond them.

45. See Stanzel 144 on romanticism. In the German context, decidedly playful versions of theatricalized ‘realist’ narrative can be found, e.g., in Wilhelm Raabe. For Victorian literature, Nünning cites the prominence of metanarrativity, the function of which he primarily describes as that of establishing normative consensus for this context (“Mimesis des Erzählens” 41).

46. Classically, the technique is associated with Jane Austen (see Genette, Revisited 54), but it had its beginnings certainly as early as in Aphra Behn (Fludernik, Towards 169).

47. As summarized by Stanzel 122; see, e.g., Spielhagen.
Antinarrative Acts
PERFORMANCE THEORY

If the plots of narratology can, in a playfully polemic spirit, be read as staging encounters with shady antagonists from the performance family, it requires less hermeneutic effort, or critical energy, to discover an analogous drama in the discipline of performance studies. According to most of its theorists and practitioners, what makes performance interesting is precisely its radical break with narrative. Genealogically, this insistence can be explained with the central role that avant-garde theory and practice assumed within the otherwise dispersed cultural and disciplinary origins of performance studies (which included impulses from anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, rhetoric, gender, and critical race studies as well as theater studies; Jackson 159). Even when theater studies were formed as such in the context of modernist practices in the first decades of the twentieth century, directors and authors such as Max Reinhardt, Filippo Marinetti, Max Herrmann, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and Sergei Radlov variously advocated emancipation from the dominance of the literary text in nineteenth-century European theater. A few decades later, performance studies won its contours by radicalizing this critique through a turn now also against theater, not only as the institutional practice still based on “Eurocentric drama” but even as theatricality in Eco’s sense of highlighted mediation, to the effect, not least, of creating fundamental ambiguities in the field’s simultaneously theater-based conceptual development.

A crucial point of reference for later twentieth-century conceptualizations of performance was Antonin Artaud’s powerful version of the antinarrative argument (see Carlson, Performance 100), which assembles the theoretical motifs to be unpacked in this section. Attacking Western theater for its concentration on “dialogue,” Artaud championed Balinese and other non-Western forms as models for a future theater in which “a new bodily language no longer based on words” (92, 88) would defy European drama’s traditional functions of “defin[ing] a character” or “resolv[ing] conflicts of a human, emotional order” (95). From the vantage point of the narratological discourses outlined in the previous section, Artaud targets narrative as both mimesis—the constitution of narrative worlds—and Genettean diegesis: a mode of mediated presentation specifically associated with language. While often summarized under the label ‘critique of representation,’ these two moves obviously have

49. Jackson 23, with reference to SChechner; see Worthen 1093.
quite divergent implications. The radical concepts of performance developed by Artaud and other avant-gardists thus attain their specific contours through the ways in which they merge a critique of mimetic realism with a critique of linguistic mediation, forfeiting representation as figuration in the sense of both world-making and (‘theatrical’) rhetorical process. In effect, the intended “‘destruction of imitation’” (Jackson 125) often proceeded as a search for ‘non-representational’ immediacy, or the ‘Real.’

Paradigmatically developed in much of the arts of the 1960s (see Carlson, Performance 103–8), these antinarrative avant-garde concepts shaped performance theory particularly in its phenomenological variants. In contrast, semiotic approaches—generally cited as the second major paradigm in the field (see Carlson, “Semiotics”)—offer building blocks for my project of mapping the aesthetics of narrative performance. From Barthes’s classical discussions of Brechtian epic theater to more recent feminist performance scholarship, they have explored rhetorical mediation on the theater and acknowledged the importance of narrative and narratology (e.g., see Pavis 219; Brandstetter, Bildspring). At the same time, the antinarrative theme in performance studies reaches beyond phenomenology. While semiotic approaches often share the critique of narrative as mimetic world-making, the opposition between phenomenology and semiotics itself is troubled by the emergence of deconstructive approaches (as closely allied with gender, postcolonial, and queer studies in performance theory), which were shaped by impulses from both sides. My discussion here proceeds from the radically antinarrative acts of phenomenology to the more complicated, if partial parallel, conceptualizations developed by deconstructive and cultural studies approaches. Unlike in the narratology section, this procedure does not correspond to historical chronology, in that early phenomenological impulses from the context of the mid-twentieth-century avant-gardes resonate vibrantly also in much recent theoretical work. While in part indicative of the ongoing process of ‘disciplining’ the ‘anti-discipline’ of performance studies (see Jackson 30), this resurgence of phenomenological themes in the 2000s is also part of the broader intellectual configuration of the new millennium (as often delineated against the postmodern culture of the 1990s), a different strand of which I have discussed in the section on cognitive narratologies.

In particularly clear-cut ways, this topical brand of performance theory is represented by the influential work of German performance scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte, in critical dialogue with whom I therefore—while cross-

51. On the other hand, some phenomenological scholarship has recently turned pronarrative under the influence of cognitivism (Rozik).
52. Fischer-Lichte initially became known for her contributions to semiotics, but she has increasingly underlined phenomenological perspectives since the 1990s.
referencing other authors—position my own investigations here.\textsuperscript{53} Reminiscent of Artaud and his contemporaries, as well as early American performance studies (see Féral, “Performance and Theatricality”), the leitmotif of Fischer-Lichte’s *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (German original: *Ästhetik des Performativen*, 2004) is that performance is “not representational” (11). Her focus in this study are later twentieth-century practices that, instead of developing “a fictive world,” find their conceptual core, Fischer-Lichte argues, in a “generation of materiality” and mode of highlighting the “actors’ bodily being-in-the-world”—in short, as a *Production of Presence*, to quote the title of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s epistemologically focused analogue to Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics.\textsuperscript{54} Fischer-Lichte’s Frankfort-based colleague Hans-Thies Lehmann, who has discussed contemporary performance as *Postdramatic Theatre* (German original 1999), elaborates how it aesthetically develops the “level of the real,” which had always punctured the process of theatrical representation (99–100). As a “theater of the present,”\textsuperscript{55} postdramatic performance replaces “story”/“history” (Geschichte) with (dynamic) “formation” (68). If this process can be discussed with reference to mimesis, Lehmann qualifies, mimesis does not signify “to imitate” here but, as it did originally, “to represent through dance” in a process of display or presentification.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{53} Jackson maps the discontinuous field of performance theories through diverging institutional narratives (NYU vs. Northwestern). My own narrative adds a third ‘school’: that of German performance theory. Fischer-Lichte’s leading position in this context is indicated by her position as the chair/speaker of the large transdisciplinary, Berlin-based research network (*Sonderforschungsbereich* “Kulturen des Performativen” (active 1999–2010; see http://www2.hu-berlin.de/performativ/; accessed 08/17/11). While a number of scholars affiliated with the network have developed ‘dissenting’ positions more in line with the deconstructive and cultural studies-inflected positions discussed below, most of them are based in literary studies (see, e.g., Lehmann, Mattenklott, and Woltersdorff, and the Munich-based theatricality study group loosely affiliated with the *Sonderforschungsbereich*: Neumann, Pross, and Wildgruber; Matala and Pornschlegel). From within German theater studies, Gabriele Brandstetter has articulated an alternative position, including explicit consideration of narrative in performance (*Bild-Sprung*: “Tanztheater”).

\textsuperscript{54} Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power* 20, 75, 82. Lehmann underlines this aesthetic’s avant-garde genealogies in Michael Kirby’s notion of “non-matrixed acting” (*Postdramatic Theatre* 135; see Kirby: *A Formalist Theater*) and Lyotard’s ‘energetic theater’ (37; see Lyotard, “The Tooth, the Palm”). Gumbrecht comments on performance as such only in passing (30–31), but Lehmann explicitly quotes an earlier version of his argument (*Postdramatic Theatre* 141).

\textsuperscript{55} 143, italics in original, with reference to Karl Heinz Bohrer’s “absolute present” as the time/lessness of the aesthetic. See Féral on performance as having “neither past nor future” (“Performance and Theatricality” 177). In reverse analogy to exclusive definitions of narrative through the past tense, many linguistic definitions of performative speech require the “dramatic” present tense (e.g., Bohle and König).

\textsuperscript{56} Lehmann references Adorno’s mimesis (and Roger Callois’s *mimétisme*) as a “presymbolic, affective ‘becoming-like-something’” (38). See also Potolsky 16.
Lehmann’s use of the verb ‘to represent’ in this context (in German: *darstellen*; *Postdramatisches Theater* 69) signals that the opposition between presence and representation emphasized in these phenomenological accounts does not function neatly. In fact, both Fischer-Lichte and Lehmann explicitly acknowledge that the outlined production of presence can only be conceptualized in an interplay with representational dimensions. In this sense, the gesturing beyond representation develops its significance on a rhetorical level; it signifies their methodological commitment to move away from (presumably dominant) “concepts [such] as ‘text’ or ‘representation’” (The Transformative Power 90). My critique foregrounds the epistemological tensions produced by this persistent privileging of phenomenology over semiotics, while indicating that Fischer-Lichte’s model also offers possibilities for interlocking both in more productive ways.

The first part of Fischer-Lichte’s argument is about media difference. In a move that inversely corresponds to Genette’s distinction between literature and the visual arts, Fischer-Lichte contrasts the “presentness” of theater, which portrays events “immediately,” with the stories of faraway events and places told by novel and epos (94). But this immediacy does not go by the name of mimesis here. Rather than a ‘copy,’ theater presents what Roland Barthes called an “emanation” of “reality” for photography, although of present, not (as in Barthes) “past” reality (Camera Lucida 88, italics in original). As a “passage of the present,” Fischer-Lichte’s theater affects its audience through the “bodily co-presence of actors and spectators” (The Transformative Power 94, 38). In stark contrast to Eco’s definition, theater here is the medium that overcomes the conditions of mediation in producing “an intense experience of presentness” (96), an “appearing” (or epiphany: *Erscheinen*), as opposed to the mere “presence effects,” or “appearance” (*Schein*) produced by electronic media.

The theoretical tension produced here resides in the ways in which Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetic theory, while introducing performance in the sense of a public event within or beyond the institution of theater as the central category of

57. See, e.g., Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theater* 38. Fischer-Lichte begins her discussion of the body in performance with Helmuth Plessner’s account of the “tension between the phenomenal body of the actor . . . and their representation of the dramatic character” (The Transformative Power 76). Criticizing bourgeois literary theater for attempting to abolish this tension in favor of character representation, Fischer-Lichte then tilts the balance in the other direction herself in her discussion of contemporary performance.

58. Fischer-Lichte’s *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, which reframes major themes from *The Transformative Power* in the context of a historical argument, integrates semiotic perspectives more fully (for the respective commitment see 25). Even here, however, the dominant rhetoric is one of deemphasizing semiotics (e.g., 77, 98, 258).

59. 101; *Ästhetik* 175, with reference to Martin Seel; see also Lehmann, “Postdramatic Theater” 102.
her theory,\textsuperscript{60} deemphasizes precisely the significance of the aesthetic framing that constitutes this event—explicitly so in the theater or with a performance in an art gallery, but virtually even in the case of an unannounced street performance. Fischer-Lichte’s insistence on the undoing of mediation in theater\textsuperscript{61} thus problematically backgrounds the dimension of communication inherent, as I argued above, in any artistic production: the orchestration of effects in its design as well as its perception by the audience.\textsuperscript{62} From a media-theoretical angle as well, Cormac Power has developed a more convincing proposal for intertwining phenomenological and semiotic perspectives: with reference to post-Husserlian phenomenology, he casts presence as “a function of theatrical signification” (8, emphasis in original). Power speaks of the “presencing” of objects in performance (the slightly awkward verb nonetheless nicely underlines the process at stake): simultaneously showcasing the complex status of actuality on the stage, theater puts presence “into play” (190, with Stanton Garner; 146).

Fischer-Lichte herself provides an alternative to the fraught topoi of her media-ontological argumentation by venturing onto the terrain of aesthetic technique. Namely, she foregrounds the techniques of rupture and disconnection through which contemporary performance art undoes the narrative structures of classical drama. This decontextualizing of individual performance elements, Fischer-Lichte argues, has an effect that makes them “appear de-semanticized” in a certain sense: the aesthetics of performance thus allows its elements to be perceived in their “specific materiality,” their “phenomenal being” (140–41).

My own readings build on this specification of (onstage) ‘presencing’ as a crucial element of contemporary aesthetics. In designating the respective cluster of techniques as those of (narrative) “presencing” or (with Gumbrecht) “presentification” (94, Gumbrecht’s emphasis), however, I hold on to the claim

\textsuperscript{60} The Transformative Power 29; the German notion is “Aufführung,” Ästhetik 41.

\textsuperscript{61} Philip Auslander has warned that such media-ontological assertions are often based on little more than clichés (2), positioning himself specifically against Peggy Phelan’s deconstruction-inflected variation on the motifs of presence in the early 1990s (Unmarked). Phelan later revised her take, now emphasizing the “technologies always already at play in live performance” (“Introduction” 9). While I share Auslander’s hesitations, his own critical story about the dominance of the televisual in our age does not completely circumvent ontological topoi (see, e.g., 52). In her discussion of Auslander, Fischer-Lichte claims (too generally) that the use of reproduction technologies in contemporary theater primarily serves to establish its specific medial identity (73).

\textsuperscript{62} See Rebentisch 73–77; Pihlainen. Despite his own fascination with bodily copresence (see, e.g., 130–31), Gumbrecht further acknowledges that we are always already in the grip of semiosis within a culture that is “predominantly a meaning culture” (106). Consequently problematizing the distinction between presence and presence effects, he locates their (re)creation not least in digital cinema (140).
that even intentionally decontextualizing and desemanticizing techniques do not altogether escape the processes of representation and configuration they bracket.

In Fischer-Lichte, the issue is foregrounded when she herself cross-references linguistic vocabulary, namely—on the one hand—Walter Benjamin’s early twentieth-century linguistic theory and—on the other—the discipline’s most prominent contribution to the performative turn, Austin’s speech acts. With Benjamin, Fischer-Lichte’s decontextualized things in performance “reveal their ‘intrinsic meaning’” through “a kind of contemplative immersion,” whereby materiality operates as the signified: “Materiality, signifier and signified coincide.” As the performative gesture thus becomes visible in its “self-referentiality” (The Transformative Power 141), it specifically corresponds to Austin’s “so-called original performatives,” in their quality of what Austin himself would later call the “illocutionary” act, that is, the act performed “in saying something.” Crucially, this assertion of self-referentiality conflicts with the antimimetic motif (recurring across the entire field of performance studies) according to which performance is defined precisely through its “oppositional relation” to “[e]xpressivity” (here Fischer-Lichte, The Transformative Power 27). Rather than against all meaning, Fischer-Lichte turns against representation in the (post)modernist sense of a play of signs that brackets reference, or, as I will elaborate, against the interplay of difference and similarity in figuration. Surprisingly, this move allies contemporary performance with its declared ‘arch-enemy,’ the antitheatrical bourgeois theater of the ‘fourth wall.’


64. Fischer-Lichte, The Transformative Power 141; see Lehmann 96, 104. This effect is not the only one Fischer-Lichte sees operating in performance (see below), but she asserts its primacy both temporally (e.g., 142) and conceptually, declaring semiotic interpretations as “in-commensurable” with the performative event itself (16).

65. Austin 99 (italics in original); see Fischer-Lichte, The Transformative Power 32. Along with her Sonderforschungsbereich colleagues from linguistics, Fischer-Lichte would probably insist that the performative cannot actually be identified with the illocutionary, but this means primarily not with the illocutionary dimension of language in general (see Bohle and König 17–18, referencing Searle). Defining the performative through more specific formal criteria (ibid., 18), these recent conceptualizations reverse Austin’s move of generalization (see similarly also Sedgwick, Touching Feeling 4–5) in favor of a definition in which the performative transgresses “the borderline between sign/non-sign” (Krämer and Stahlhut 57). My point is that this notion of the performative implicitly aligns itself with the post-Austinian tradition of emphasizing illocution over perlocution, an emphasis that has become a prime target of deconstructive criticism (see below).

66. See, e.g., Wild on the history of this antitheatricality. Fischer-Lichte affirmatively quotes German director Peter Stein—generally identified with the representational theater despised by the aesthetics of performance—on the “‘miracle’ of theater” as constituted by the actor “not imitating anything, but ‘embod[y]ing’” his role (The Transformative Power 94).
performances also with Austin's linguistic acts is consistent in this shared anti-
theatricality, but nonetheless ironic, given how Austin (in)famously delineated
his notion of performative speech by excluding aesthetic uses of language as
nonserious or "parasitic": "a performative utterance will . . . be in a peculiar
way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem,
or spoken in soliloquy" (22, italics in original).

In opposition to this move, semiotic and especially deconstructive
approaches had set out to theorize performance precisely by emphasizing
the productivity of Austin's "void"—as 'gap,' 'distance,' etc. (e.g., see Wirth,
"Der Performanzbegriff" 17–25). While Austin's wording underlines that
the targeted condition of framed speech virtually defines all aesthetic prac-
tices (see also Rebentisch 37), the concept has been specifically developed
for the theater and, beyond its institutional context, through the concept
of theatricality (see Jackson 13; see also Samuel Weber 3–4). Thus, perfor-
ance has been conceptualized as a "foregrounding of the actor-spectator
relationship" and "mode of communicative display" that highlights "the way
in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential
content." Deconstructive criticism generalized the gap between signifier
and referent as a feature of communication per se by epistemologically tying
it to the conditions of symbolic mediation (or rhetoricity) as such. Leveling
Austin's distinction between "normal" and "parasitic" speech acts, Derrida
established "iterability"—"the possibility" of being repeated, or "of extrac-
tion and of citational grafting"—as a structural feature of all signification,
which becomes manifest in writing (Derrida, "Signature" 315, 320). Also on
the theater, Derrida underlined in reading Artaud, presence thus remains
necessarily haunted by "representation," or "the necessity of repetition" (57)
that initiates a play of absence and presence, past, present, and future, figu-
ration and defiguration, similarity and difference. From the angle of this epis-
temological critique, "theater," as involving both mediation and repetition,
"haunts all performance" (Blau 143, his emphasis)—and operates as "the
repressed of performance" (Diamond, Performance 4) in its phenomenologi-
cal conceptualizations.

67. Carlson, "Resistance" 241, quoting David Marshall; Bauman, Story, Performance and
Event 3; A world 9; Eco (as quoted above). See also Goffman's theatricality-based model of com-
munication as an exchange of moves "characterized by an orientation to some sort of answer-
ing" and moves "being seen as an answering" (24; see 4).
68. The performative is then defined through its "necessarily 'aberrant' relation to its own
reference" (Parker and Sedgwick 3, with reference to de Man).
69. See, e.g., Menke; Franko and Richards 1–2; Blau 143.
70. The "oblique intersection between performativity and . . . performance" (Parker and
Sedgwick 1) thus postulated by deconstructive scholarship has often been conceptualized all
This poststructuralist critique has troubled phenomenological performance theory (see Carlson, *Performance* 149). In Fischer-Lichte’s account, the cultural influence of poststructuralism can be detected in the quotation marks through which she brackets Benjamin’s substantialist language (“‘intrinsic meaning’”) and in her distancing herself from his theological philosophy of language bygrounding the emergence of this meaning in “the subject’s perception of things in their phenomenal being” (*The Transformative Power* 145). In this sense, Fischer-Lichte’s insistence on intrinsic meaning seems to function in the way in which Bert States describes “The Phenomenological Attitude”: as an explicit decision for “‘methodological solipsism’” (with Maurice Natanson) in bracketing context, to the effect of creating the conditions of perceptual “‘insularity’” through which aesthetic experience has been characterized.  

Even such bracketing, however, does—as States, significantly, spells out by quoting the semiotician Eco—not erase meanings but merely turns referents into “‘extremely ambiguous texts’” (31). By quoting Benjamin in ‘bracketed’ form, Fischer-Lichte ambiguously inserts herself into his theological narrative about the fall of meaning in modernity. Within the postmodern epistemological field, her theory of performance as a mode of “‘magically’” (also in quotation marks, 98) producing the essence of the thing carves out an aesthetic niche for Benjamin’s critique of representational contingency.

More generally, Fischer-Lichte’s antinarrative performances are articulated through the theoretical narratives of philosophical phenomenology (Plessner, Merleau-Ponty) and German critical theory (Benjamin, Adorno), in combination with more recent impulses from cognitive science: the presence generated in performance, she words, highlights “the nature of man as embodied mind” and “fulfils the civilizing process’s promise of happiness” (99) in working toward a “reenchantment of the world.”

Her insistence on ‘nature’ positions Fischer-Lichte’s approach in a distinct tension with the cultural studies–affiliated, deconstructivist performance scholarship of the 1990s, which investigated performance for how it engages sociosymbolic figurations, specifically of gender, sexuality, race, and class. In discussing an experimental
too vaguely, inviting charges that ‘literary’ deconstructivism effaces the specificity of embodied performance (see, e.g., Worthen). However, epistemological, media-theoretical, and aesthetic questions should be kept apart here as well.

71. States 26; Gumbrecht 103 (with Bakhtin’s notion), 101. If only half-explicitly, Gumbrecht ultimatelygrounds his presence effects in interpretation (see Claude Haas).

72. In “Diskurse,” Fischer-Lichte explains her use of the notion of magic by asserting that the experience in question can be explained rationally after the fact, but at first presents a radical loss of control (“Erfahrung von Unverfügbarkeit” 25). For the pervasiveness of the topos, see also Krämer and Stahlhut (41) and Gumbrecht’s reference to the Catholic Eucharist (29).

73. 168, 181. See, similarly, Krämer and Stahlhut 58, and Gumbrecht xv.
1996 Berlin production (Frank Castorf’s *The Devil’s General*), for example, Fischer-Lichte argues, with indicative rhetorical forcefulness, that the cross-casting of the protagonist produced an “irrevocable divergence between the undeniably female body and the unmistakably male behavior” of the performer, “unmistakably” pointing to her (female) “bodily being-in-the-world” (88). As Fischer-Lichte also insists, this effect had “nothing to do with Brecht’s alienation effect” (213). Like Fischer-Lichte’s performer, Brecht’s actor breaks open the diegetic cosmos of bourgeois theater by not allowing himself “to be wholly transformed into the character played” at any moment (*A Short Organon* 193–94). His epic style, however, is designed to expose the theatricality of theater and thereby render legible the (nonnatural) signs of ideological narrative. Performance scholarship of the 1990s variously built on Brecht’s suggestion that cross-casting allows to highlight the “social gest” (*Gestus*), which shapes bodily and facial expressions: “played by somebody of the opposite sex the gender of the character will be more clearly brought out.” As the presentation of a ‘copy’ makes the “original” visible as “‘figure,’” the “serious play of drag” in Fischer-Lichte’s example would thus not present the actor’s physicality but theatricalize the historical masculinity of the general.

From the angle of cultural studies–inflected approaches, Fischer-Lichte’s insistence on ‘unmistakable’ physicality can thus pose the question whether the return of phenomenology in the 2000s amounts to a political backlash. As States suggested early on, phenomenology presents an “alternative to the radical skepticism of deconstruction and postmodernism” (27), and the quest for such alternatives has certainly found resonance in postmillennium academic culture. However, the political allegiances of these new phenomenologies are diverse, ranging from an explicit move beyond radical politics (e.g., in Gumbrecht) to the attempt precisely of finding new epistemological foundations for large-scale leftist projects. Recent work in feminist phenomenology has also pondered nonessentializing ways of responding to the ‘given’ experience of gendered physicalities (e.g., Stoller), and performance scholars such as Eve K. Sedgwick and Jill Dolan have undertaken the methodological shift toward phenomenology without abandoning their explicitly antiheteronormative and
radical democratic politics. While my reading has demonstrated that I remain unconvinced of the epistemological proposals of exclusively phenomenological paradigms, I take these contrary political charges as an invitation to pursue with critical curiosity how precisely the aesthetics of presence—along with the no less politically versatile aesthetics of theatricality—functions in individual texts.

First, however, I need to spell out the epistemological layer of my own concept of narrative performance more fully. A final glance at Fischer-Lichte’s self-demarcation from 1990s performance theory, specifically Judith Butler’s influential approach, guides me toward doing so. In Fischer-Lichte’s own argument, the victory of nature in performance is not the victory of hegemonic gender regimes, either, but that of aesthetic alterity as, she claims, a more radical difference from ideology. In her reading of Butler’s early article “Performative Acts,” Fischer-Lichte suggests that Butler’s (everyday as well as aesthetic) performances function as “the staging of a given text” circumscribed by “given stage descriptions,” whereas her own aesthetic performances in their singularity (and thus unscripted nature) “significantly” alter rather than merely repeating “historical pattern” (28). Notably, Fischer-Lichte’s own wording implies that even intentionally unscripted performative acts operating in the bracketed sphere of aesthetic experience do not actually escape social script (in the broader sense) or cultural narrative. However, she rhetorically disavows the significance of citation (or, in the register of bodily performance: mimesis) with the—nonsensical—opposition of ‘repetition vs. unscripted alteration’.

78. Sedgwick, Touching Feeling 3; Dolan, Utopia (explicitly, e.g.) 21. Like Fischer-Lichte, Sedgwick also turns away from language here, if not quite as radically. Dolan, who focuses on aesthetics (and whom I engage in more detail in subsequent chapters), does not distance her model from Brecht in the way Fischer-Lichte does (see 7). Given such differences, we may wonder whether Fischer-Lichte’s theory reflects a specifically German articulation of performance theory, a question that Geoffrey Winthrop-Young has asked with respect to German media theory and Kulturwissenschaft (vs. Anglo-American cultural studies) more generally. While insisting on the transnational dimensions of knowledge production as well as the heterogeneity of German academia, I agree that hegemonic approaches within German Kultur- and Medienwissenschaften have been shaped by theoretical narratives underlining the forces of homogeneity and heteronomy, in opposition to Anglo-American cultural studies with their interest in social differences and the agency of audiences (see Winthrop-Young 118, 122).

79. Already Barthes critically underlined that the ‘grand narrative’ of Brecht’s Marxist (capital H) ‘History’ shapes the cultural work of his Gestus (“Diderot” 73), suggesting that it is “the Law of the Party which cuts out the epic scene” (77). In this sense, the only respective difference between the paradigms of presence and theatricality is that the implicit narrativity of modernist performance is acknowledged more openly by the latter.

80. Ästhetik 39. The English translation (see 28) is imprecise here. Butler’s own wording is that “the gendered body . . . enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives” (277).
and thus forestalls investigations into how exactly sociosymbolic scripts in the broader sense also coconstitute aesthetic performance.\(^{81}\) As readers of Butler know, Fischer-Lichte's possibilities of significant alteration—or the rewriting of cultural scripts—are at the center of her interest as well. In Butler, however, this interest is combined with an interest in how performance functions as, in Richard Schechner's words, “restored behavior”: “[N]ever for the first time” (36–37), it always involves “mental comparison with a potential, an ideal, or a remembered original model” (Carlson, *Performance* 5). Rather than functioning just self-referentially (or even self-reflexively),\(^{82}\) theatricalized performance thus attains its significance by virtue of how it repeats, or restages, its models. Tracing these restagings, Butler outlined the twofold role of performance in the making as well as unmaking specifically of gender identities: On the one hand, it constitutes gender through “the repeated stylization of the body” congealing “over time to produce the appearance of substance” (*Gender Trouble* 33); on the other hand, it implies the chance of critically replaying the figures of gender.

After *Gender Trouble* had been misunderstood as advocating a “volitional” model of gender performance (e.g., see Rothenberg and Valente), *Bodies That Matter* supplemented the model of bodily drag with that of linguistic reiteration and potential resignification. Adding another minichapter to the history of (even deconstructivist) antitheatricality, Butler unfortunately worded this reorientation as a turn against theatricality.\(^{83}\) But while this demarcation was unnecessary, there is, conversely, no need to reject the linguistic model for the analysis of theater or other visual arts, as long as we proceed to specify media-

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81. In this context, see also Fischer-Lichte's discussion of a second (and, in her account, in fact secondary) mode of signification in performance, in addition to the process of 'dese-\(\)manticization' discussed above. Precisely the isolated phenomena perceived in their materiality, this argument runs, “trigger a wealth of associations” in the spectator—associations that “interweave unique subjective experiences with intersubjectively valid cultural codes” (*The Transformative Power* 140, 143). Insisting on aesthetic alterity, however, Fischer-Lichte proceeds to downplay the role of these codes (see, e.g., 250). While her first mode of (de)signification in performance generates (natural) identity, the second one thus in effect generates primarily difference from cultural narratives—or 'ideology' (see, e.g., 69)—at the expense of similarity.

82. See Reinelt, “Politics of Discourse,” 206. Self-reflexivity is to be distinguished from self-referentiality. Whereas the latter concept arrests the play of signification, the former focuses attention on the process of representation (see, in different words, but to similar effect: Wirth, “Der Performanzbegriff” 27). However, even self-reflexivity has, in some deconstructivist scholarship, been developed as a gesture of quasi-‘pure,’ paradoxically nontheatrical theatricality (‘the speech act speaks of nothing but itself’). For a critique of the flight from theatricality implicit in these totalizing moves, see Geulen (“Erziehungsakte”).

83. As “a reiteration of a norm” rather than “a singular ‘act’” (*Bodies* 283), the performative “is not primarily theatrical; indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated” (12; see—critically—Dolan, “Geographies” 420; Jackson 189).
specific forms of signification on the next level of analysis. In *Excitable Speech*, Butler specified how the social ‘text’ is given to, and can nonetheless be rewritten by, the performing subject, by developing Austin’s distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts. The concept of the illocutionary, Butler argues here, develops “a fantasy of sovereign action” (17). As I suggested above, Fischer-Lichte’s self-referential performative works in this way: its “magical” short-circuiting of signifier, signified, and referent implies a ‘monarchical,’ or theological, model of signification in which the performative directly “enacts domination,” at the expense of imaginative room for (be it the artist’s or the audience’s) critical agency. In contrast, the perlocutionary act, the temporality of which is not exhausted by a simple present tense, “merely leads to certain effects that are not the same as the speech act itself” (*Excitable Speech* 3; see 9). Thus, the perlocutionary can be used as a model for theorizing the ways in which acts of (for Butler, particularly social) script writing themselves are vulnerable to failure and open for (aesthetic and social) reinscription. The agency of rescripting thus emerges, “within a linguistic field of enabling constraints” (16), as the agency in citing with a difference.

With respect to the aesthetic works of literature (and specifically the interpellative act of apostrophe as a mode of literary ‘talk’), Kacandes has introduced an analogous distinction between the, as she words, “limit case” of the (illocutionary) “literary performative” that does not leave the reader any choice (‘you are reading this sentence’) and the reader’s overall deliberate performance of the text’s inscribed ‘you,’ which makes visible her agency as an active participant in the exchange with a (nonsovereign) text (183–84; see 3–4). For the theater itself, Elin Diamond (implicitly) answers Fischer-Lichte’s concerns by describing aesthetic performance as “the site in which . . . the ‘concealed or dissimulated conventions’ of which acts are mere repetitions might be investigated and reimagined” precisely because “performativity materializes in concentrated form” here. In her *Unmaking Mimesis*, Diamond explicitly redevelops the latter notion—otherwise often shunned in deconstructive

84. The illocutionary model, Butler spells out, adequately captures actual linguistic processes only under circumscribed institutional conditions—see Austin’s example of the judge (17). This constitutes a pragmatic version of the poststructuralist critique of the illocutionary act (see, e.g., Cohen; Campe; de Man).

85. 21, 18, italics in original. If, as Fischer-Lichte herself cautions with respect to Benjamin, God no longer guarantees such short-circuiting, the theorist, performer, or spectator must usurp his role—but she effaces her own interpretative act in identifying, e.g., nature as the ultimate referent of a performance. A more definite championing of (metaphorically primarily divine and monarchic) heteronomy is developed by Sybille Krämer—one of Fischer-Lichte’s colleagues in the *Sonderforschungsbereich*—in the 2008 *Medium Bote Übertragung*.

performance theory as well—for this context. Conceptualizing (Aristotelian) mimesis as an interplay of difference and similarity in performance, Diamond associates this interplay with both the Brechtian “gestus,” which imitates “only so much as gives a picture” (ii; Brecht, “The Street Scene” 123), and with Luce Irigaray’s feminist mimicry as that “what Plato most dreaded, impersonation” (v). For my project of differentiating aesthetic techniques, the plurality of theatricalizing forms indicated here is crucial: while in Brecht’s sober worlds, the process of differential repetition—or also, with José Esteban Muñoz’s work on minority performance, disidentification—has been developed as a form of presentational restraint, advocates of camp and queer theory have located the critical potential precisely in “unnatural, . . . affectedly dramatic” behavior or presentational excess and playfulness.87

Furthermore, techniques of decontextualization come into play here as well. Attesting to their shared antinarrative bent, deconstructive performance theories have underlined the motif as prominently as their phenomenological counterparts. If “citational grafting” is implied in every sign (Derrida, “Signature” 320), to be sure, it would seem that signification generally proceeds through the double move of “decontextualization and recontextualization of discourse” (Bauman, A World 9). However, deconstruction-affiliated scholarship has rhetorically privileged the former of these moves, describing the sign through its “force of breaking with its context” (Derrida, “Signature” 317) and variously emphasizing the moment of “radical rupture,” the performative’s affinity with “failure” or (in analogy to Fischer-Lichte) “the singularity of the theatrical event,”88 as well as the ‘modernist’ Brecht who emphasized cutting (e.g., Dialoge 100), and with whom narrative itself can be conceptualized as a technique of rupture (Brandstetter, Bild-Sprung 120).89

Butler’s Excitable Speech challenges this one-sided emphasis on the break with an argument for the relative stability of meanings by supplementing Derrida’s theory of language with Pierre Bourdieu’s accounts of how social force operates in language. Although Butler acknowledges Derrida’s insistence on rupture as a precondition for theorizing the “insurrectionary force” of counterhegemonic speech acts, which is foreclosed by Bourdieu’s conceptualization of performative force as “the effect” of “established . . . authority” (141–42),

87. The quote is from Case, “The Emperor’s New Clothes” 187 (citing The American Heritage Dictionary); see also Carlson, “Resistance.”
88. Felman 100, 44; Samuel Weber 7 (italics in original); see also (e.g.) 323.
89. Of course, there is another Brecht who, to the dismay of his later twentieth-century readers, sided with Aristotle in privileging plot as the “soul of drama,” over the ‘excess’ of spectacle and the actor’s presence (A Short Organon 183; see, e.g., Diamond, Unmaking Mimesis 45; Puchner 156).
she criticizes Derrida for overemphasizing the arbitrary character of the sign vis-à-vis the force of established tropes and topoi. Historically 'sedimented' through repeated use (148), these meanings are referenced in the act of performative citation and may significantly inflect even intentionally highly aberrant uses. Moving beyond the fetishized dichotomy between 'expression' and 'nonexpressive' performance, Butler’s project of thinking “the logic of iterability as a social logic” (150) thus charts the complexity of resignification as a process that proceeds through the intertwined forces of narrative and performance. However, even Butler entangles herself in the dominant mappings of performance against representation and narrative, and she fails to take this conceptualization all the way. This is indicated by the ways in which the body—surprisingly, in the context of Butler’s earlier work, but reminiscent of Fischer-Lichte—returns in Excitable Speech as a figure of otherness vis-à-vis sociosymbolic inscription. To avoid misunderstandings, the renewed emphasis on the body as such would be welcome news if it helped correct the often criticized deconstructive tendency to dissolve this body into textual play.90 When Butler, however, draws on Shoshana Felman to describe the nonsovereign nature of the speech act through the “body” as “a sign of unknowingness” (Excitable Speech 10; see Felman 67) and charges Bourdieu with failing to understand how “what is bodily in speech resists” (142), she reinvokes the body’s traditionally oppositional relationship with “language” and conceptualizes the “subversive, and self-subversive, potential of the performative” through the “incongruous,” if simultaneously “indissoluble” relationship between the two (Felman 5, 43; see Butler, Excitable Speech 10, 155).

Extending Butler’s own critique of the illocutionary, I have argued elsewhere that this move points to the specters of sovereignty in Butler’s conception of language (Szenarien). To summarize this argument, Butler’s account of the perlocutionary as the nonsovereign dimension of language advocates, in Foucault’s famous words, for cutting off “the head of the king” in the realm of theory (The History of Sexuality I 89), but in the tradition of avant-garde performance theory, her contribution remains stuck in 1789/1792. Still struggling with a ‘monarchical’ imaginary of language, Butler imagines the performative act as a (metaphorically extralinguistic) gesture of radical insurrection, thus reinscribing precisely the fantasy of a revolutionary break that she herself problematizes in Derrida’s account of dehistoricized linguistic play.91 Instead, I argue for fully conceptualizing performativity as a ‘democratic’ process of

90. See, e.g., Jackson 216, also 107; Case, The Domain Matrix 14–17. However, Butler’s own use of the model of linguistic reiteration did not actually do so in previous argumentative contexts, either.

91. A similar critique of Butler has been developed by Lois McNay.
(linguistic or other) signification, in which power is negotiated at the dynamic intersection of multiple, dispersed vectors of force (see Foucault, *History of Sexuality* I 92–95), or (with Bakhtin) in the “play” of “heteroglot social opinion” (277). In this process, context—or sociosymbolic narrative—not only operates as a restraining force (as outlined by Butler) but also contributes to the critical potential of performance itself in the move of productive reconfiguration. For example, Butler cites Rosa Parks’s insurrectionary act of “laying claim” to a right not guaranteed to her “by any of the segregationist conventions of the South” (*Excitable Speech*, 147). This does not mean, however, that Parks did so with “no recourse to a prior authorization” at all (158). Rather than fueled just by the mythical exhaustion of her body (a trope that, I should clarify, is not cited in *Excitable Speech*), Parks’s act of resistance drew on alternative human rights narratives: despite the latter’s dominantly exclusive articulations throughout modernity, they also provided a vision of universalized equality. With respect to this interplay of conflicting narratives—or, with Bakhtin again, the ways in which any utterance is always already entangled in a web of “points of view” (276)—performance is a mode of (variously more or less) critical reconfiguration rather than simply a break with available figures of sociosymbolic articulation. Further developing Butler’s own gestures into the same direction (see, e.g., 40), I thus conceptualize narrative performance on the most fundamental level as this intertwining of break and configuration always already inherent in signification, which develops a range of divergent effects in complexly interwoven gestures of dissent and affirmation.

As a point about figuration, this notion of narrative performance can be supported with a glance at the theory of metaphor. Based on its structuralist conceptualization as the vertical domain of discourse (see Jacobson), metaphor has been theorized as an antinarrative performative, “a semiotic principle of rupture,” which suspends reference and breaks up coherence (thus Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema* 155) or, for the context of literature, poietic “event” (*Ereignis*), which deviates from the text’s conceptualization pattern and thereby functions as an interruptive distanciation mechanism, if not a “terrorist figure” (Biebuyck, *Die poietische Metapher* 187, 189, 235). If this performative act, however, in decontextualizing always also recontextualizes and, in

92. See Butler’s own, more complex later account in *Undoing Gender* 224.
93. “I would have to know for once and for all what rights I had as a human being and a citizen of Montgomery, Alabama” (Parks, in a 1956 radio interview with Sydney Rogers, quoted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosa_Parks; accessed 07/07/09). Butler’s *Precarious Life* (see chapters IV and VI) suggests that she would herself concede to this reevaluation of modern concepts of equality.
94. See, e.g., Carole Anne Tyler’s *Female Impersonation* on how critical restagings of gender in subcultural contexts are often fueled by hegemonic significations of race and class.
citing cultural narratives, produces new ones in the given context of articulation itself, the ‘violent’ gestures of metaphor can instead be conceptualized as integral elements of narrative understood as a (constitutively theatrical) form not restricted to a ‘horizontal’ domain of linear plot unfolding, but always developed through a play of configuration including contrast, analogy, and similarity.

A concluding glance at Butler’s 2005 *Giving an Account of Oneself* returns me to the project of specifying this general process in terms of aesthetics. In response to the broader comeback of narrative in the 2000s, Butler now explicitly addresses the narrative dimension of self-constitution, but her conceptual frame and argumentative rhetoric still remain marked by insistence on the limits of narrativization and the performance-vs.-narrative dichotomy (see, e.g., 63, 66). I completely agree with the message of Butler’s theoretical story in *Giving an Account*: holding on to a moderate version of the poststructuralist ethics of alterity, she argues against violent demands “for self-identity or . . . complete coherence” (42) as “a fantasy of impossible mastery” (65). However, the rich sewing kit of narratology allows for retelling this story as a story about different kinds of narration. As Butler points out, I cannot claim authority over and authorship for all of my actions (see 79), but that does not mean that I cannot function as a narrator. Without any doubt pathetically unreliable at moments, I am, once I concede this possibility, able to participate in an intersubjective, democratic process of narrative configuration. Rather than remaining altogether “fabulous” in the sense of a complete foreclosure of reference, my non-“final” (= nonsovereign) account can be (evaluated by others as) more or less “adequate” to my communicative purpose, rather than the “moment of failure in every narrative effort to give an account of myself” (79), the first-person pronoun designates, as indicated above with Booth and Eco, simply one technique of foregrounding theatricality within narrative—a moment in which “the seamlessness of the story” visibly yields to the complexity of productive rearticulation enabled by “moments of interruption” (64). Like Kacandes’s second-person pronoun, and the aesthetics of narrative performance more generally, this moment marks a chance or, from an alternative angle, the necessity of rethinking narrative authority in contemporary culture. As I have suggested, it rarely effects the simple undoing of such authority; instead, the various techniques outlined here enable, as I will

95. Biebuyck’s more recent work has moved toward integrating tropes into narrative through the (still somewhat hesitant) category of the “paranarrative” (“Figurativeness”).

96. On the concept of narrative configuration, specifically with respect to intertextual frames (or topoi), see Pier.

97. 37 (with Keenan), 67: Butler all too quickly parallelizes ‘final’ and ‘adequate.’
spell out in detail, a range of nonsovereign and more or less egalitarian forms of (partial, limited, negotiable) authority in representation.

The Aesthetics of Narrative Performance at ‘Location Germany’

In this study, I unfold this turn-of-the-twenty-first-century aesthetics of narrative performance through a case study of contemporary German culture. Given my insistence on the transnational dimensions of aesthetic production, this national delineation may seem counterintuitive. However, the underlying methodological claim is that the national and the transnational are not to be positioned in opposition to one another. Rather, the constitution of national imaginaries, identities, and institutions has always been an effect of transcultural flows, even more so at the “interlocking contours of nation, transnation and postnation” in today’s self-consciously globalized age (Adelson, The Turkish Turn 2). For example, in analyzing how Godard’s films, North American performance theory, and practices of African storytelling are adapted in literary texts, films, and theater productions created, read, and watched in contemporary Germany, I am pursuing an essentially comparative or, better, transnational project. At the same time, localizing my endeavor is methodologically crucial as well. Aesthetic productions attain their specific contours—their thematic preoccupations and concrete forms, modes of address and cultural effects—in their sociopolitical, linguistic, discursive, and institutional contexts of production and reception. In this sense, I assert that aesthetic theory needs to incorporate the cultural embeddedness of its objects: a ‘thick’ aesthetic description can be developed in a (political) context only.98 Framing the project in geopolitical terms thus enables me to untangle the cultural work accomplished by aesthetic practices of narrative performance against the background of specific memory cultures and claims to collective identification—cultures and claims that, again, attest to the indelible interarticulation of the national and the transnational.

The contemporary culture of the so-called Berlin Republic presents an intriguingly rich, as well as highly complex, reservoir for this project. The

98. Recent scholarship has underlined that we should not fuse aesthetics and politics all too quickly. I agree that form is not “inherently” ideological in the sense that a formal feature could be short-circuited with a particular function or meaning (Carroll xv; as, importantly, acknowledged also by earlier, explicitly ‘ideological’ criticism, e.g., Lanser, Fictions of Authority 23). However, form is not ‘nonideological,’ either. In configuration-dependent and flexible ways to be disentangled by detailed analysis, it is always coshaped by, as well as coshapes, the sociopolitical context of its emergence.
legacy of the German Kulturnation (cultural nation), that is, the ways in which German national identity has been historically founded, in the initial absence of political unity, even more so than other imagined communities (Benedict Anderson) on the purported distinction of its ‘high’ arts, still resonates—both in the comparatively generous state funding that has enabled, for example, a uniquely experimental theater scene and in the public charges that the arts have received in ongoing collective identification processes. Time and again, German feuilleton debates have interrogated the function in particular—but not exclusively—of the novel for collective identity constitution (see chapters III and V). Literary authors, but also, for example, the makers of both the ‘smart popular’ and the experimental ‘Berlin School’ cinema, which together brought a new international attention to German cinema in the 2000s (see chapters II and VI), have responded with a wealth of critical creativity to such demands for culture that matters, developing their own varied, often dissenting answers to the question of art’s potential in the public sphere.

The desire to reassess collective memories and identities at the turn of the twenty-first century as such won particular urgency in a context in which the transition from the Cold War into today’s age of global insecurity included the task of overcoming forty years of split political and sociocultural development, as well as the lingering legacy of a preceding national history that, in 1945, for many seemed to have undone the possibility of any positive collective identity. In the 1990s, ongoing debates about the significance of the Holocaust for Germany’s political memory and the reconstitution of national identity vis-à-vis continued socioeconomic inequalities between East and West, furthermore, met with reassessments of postwar labor immigration, especially from Turkey. Simultaneously, the reform of the welfare state started to unravel the relative social security with which not only the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) but also the West German island of postwar European ‘social market economy’ had provided its citizens, and the formation of the European Union (EU) began to supersede national sovereignty and respective political identifications.

Between the rise of racist hate crimes after unification, ongoing conflicts about Turkey’s EU membership, and the attacks of September 11, 2001, the country’s political representatives and majority citizens have, in particular, struggled to face postnational realities of cultural diversity. Prevailing definitions of national belonging in ethnic, implicitly racialized ways had long denied these realities, as indicated by the established political credo that Germany was ‘not a country of immigration’ and the ius sanguinis–based citizenship law responsible for the fact that a majority of Germany’s third-generation descendants of labor immigrants continued to be foreigners. At the turn of the
twenty-first century, the Social Democrat–Green Party government elected in 1998 eventually challenged this state of affairs. Almost as soon as the revised citizenship legislation and the increasing sociocultural visibility of Germans of color began to open up a space for new imaginations of identity and belonging (see Adelson, The Turkish Turn 14), however, September 11 and the following wars also fortified a “climate of ethnic tribalism and fetishization of cultural difference” (Göktürk, “Strangers” 121). The anti-Islamisms accompanying the War on Terror provided transnational contexts for a refashioning of the racialized discourses of national identity that had dominated twentieth-century German culture since their decisive formation in the country’s—short but gruesomely violent—colonial period. Between these contrasting trends, questions of race and cultural identity mark a particularly highly charged socio-symbolic terrain in contemporary German society. Compared to the United States of the Bush administration years, issues of gender and sexuality have as such been less publicly contested, although they have taken center stage in arguments about cultural and religious difference (e.g., in headscarf debates), as well as shaped ongoing reforms of same-sex partnership and transgender rights legislation.

My study situates itself at these crossroads. In my choice of texts, I emphasize cultures of migration and transnational exchanges in an increasingly connected, if English-language–dominated, world of cultural production. Mapping contemporary German culture—or contemporary culture at ‘location Germany,’ as we can reword with a catchphrase from economics (see Halle, “German Film”)—requires acknowledging that twenty-first-century German literary bestseller lists feature a majority of translated titles (see Gerstenberger and Herminghouse 2), that film production can hardly be discussed in national categories any longer, and that international traffic has become increasingly constitutive also of the comparatively protected world of heavily state-subsidized art theater, beyond its traditionally open borders within the German-language realm (that is, with Austria and Switzerland). At the same time, German feuilletons not only continue to count the market shares of ‘German’ films in precisely these national terms but have also been filled with new assertions of cultural identity in the above-specified tradition of the Kulturnation. Tracing transatlantic and inner-European exchanges of themes, scripts, tropes, and audiences as well as local clusterings, my study strives to account for the complexities of this—to use the trendy shortcut once—‘glocalized’ configuration (see Taberner, German Literature xxii).

The following chapters map the aesthetics of narrative performance in contemporary culture through close readings of individual texts and productions. The procedure reflects my insistence on context also with respect to the
aesthetic work as the articulation context of a specific formal feature. Rather than a comprehensive typology of techniques (thus, e.g., Nünning and Sommer 114), I unfold exemplary configurations as they are developed in individual production and reception processes. In doing so, however, I am guided by two—intersecting—larger hypotheses. On the one hand, I postulate that my initial distinction between two clusters of techniques, those of presence-oriented vs. theatricalized narrative, is useful also in mapping cultural trends. Thus, I argue that the theatricality-affiliated (‘postmodern’) culture of the 1990s is superseded by the resurgence of presence-oriented forms in the 2000s. On the other hand, I show that this diagnosis has to be differentiated with respect to the trajectories of specific media cultures. In chapters II through IV, I therefore focus individually on the three media under discussion: film, literature, and theater. In doing so, I also acknowledge the significance of media-specific arguments in the theoretical discourses outlined so far, including traditional literary narratology as well as the nontraditional field of performance studies shaped by anxieties about its disciplinary status (see Jackson 30–34). While taking media-specificity arguments seriously, however, my readings in these chapters also move beyond them. As indicated by the high number of intermedia productions and adaptations in the contemporary cultural landscape, the aesthetics of narrative performance receives its concrete contours prominently in the intermedia transfer of concepts and techniques. Pursuing those and, more generally, establishing “analogues for techniques and effects” (Rabinowitz, “They Shoot Tigers” 181) of narrative performance in literature, film, and theater, the close readings undertaken in chapters II through IV problematize generalized media distinctions, without thereby falling prey to “medium blindness” (Ryan, “Introduction,” 34). Instead, my discussion develops a smaller-scale account of how exactly the aesthetics of narrative performance can be conceptualized for individual media contexts.

In chapter II, I begin with film as the most straightforward case to make. In the outlined theoretical encounters between narrative and performance, film has generally been located on a middle ground: as a “mixed form” combining elements of the literary art of time with the spatiality of visual media, it has often been subsumed under the ‘nonverbal,’ ‘mimetic,’ or ‘performative’ forms contrasted with narrative but has simultaneously been more broadly acknowledged as a narrative form in its own right than theater and performance. This discursive in-between location does not mean that the con-
ceptual dramas discussed in the previous sections have been absent from film theory. More substantially so than in narratology or performance studies, however, they have been identified as such early on, and the charged intersection of narrative and performance became a major locus of film-theoretical conceptualization. These discussions on how ‘spectacle’ and the aesthetics of ‘monstration’ work in classical vs. pre- and postclassical cinema (the early ‘cinema of attractions’ and that of the digital age), in various genres (comedy, musical, melodrama) as well as avant-garde films have provided us with a significant body of work specifying different aspects, degrees, and forms of narrative and performance, and detailing how narrative performance proceeds through the “large and complex variety of communicating devices” that constitute narration in the complex audiovisual medium of film, including (on and offscreen) music and voices as well as lighting, color, camera, and the use of editing (Chatman, *Coming to Terms* 134; see 135). In chapter II, I begin my own project of aesthetic specification by drawing on some of this conceptual work and translating it into the context of film ‘made in Germany’ around 2000.

My second reason for beginning with film is that the postulated overall cultural dominance of theatricality paradigms in the 1990s (and around the turn of the twenty-first century still) gains its clearest contours here. At that moment, not only, as in previous decades, politically and aesthetically avant-garde film but also popular cinema develops a multifaceted aesthetics of theatricality, in which gestures of presentification are not entirely absent but more clearly framed by—and thus subordinated to—techniques of theatricality than

in film-theoretical discussions. To be sure, this identification becomes highly precarious upon closer investigation.

101. Metz set out to deconstruct the “great argument of the ‘breakdown of narrativity’” and "blindly antinarrative myth" in avant-garde-affiliated cinema in his *Film Language* (185, 188).

102. See various contributions by Mulvey; Gunning; Geoff King; Crafton; Elsaesser and more; for details see below. The most highly charged theoretical fault line in film studies separates cognitive approaches from the semiotics-affiliated, ideology-critical psychoanalytical framework of ‘classical’ film theory since the 1970s. Dominantly pronarrative, cognitive film scholars have supplemented previously dominant discussions of the subversive character of film spectacle and attractions with accounts of their often smooth integration into film narrative. From a more critical angle, however, this very point has also been made by various contributions to the study of ideology in film. More generally, the fierce rhetoric of theoretical distancing employed by some cognitive film scholars (e.g., Carroll xviii; Gregory Currie xiv) is only partially indicative of significant conceptual shifts (especially regarding the status of ideology, the unconscious, and difference); partially, it hides unexpected overlap. For example, Carroll’s media-ontological argument about movie images being recognized through “reflex” rather than “reading” (83) recasts 1970s insistences on the passivity of the spectator, which have otherwise been forcefully criticized by cognitive scholarship (e.g., Bordwell, *Narration* 29–47; Smith, “Film Spectatorship”).
in turn-of-the-twenty-first-century literature or theater. I explain this particularly clear-cut development through the confluence of intermedially influential theatricality paradigms with a media-specific trajectory, namely, the ways in which cinematic production, in the cultural moment of postmodernism, responded to the dominance of (relatively) invisible narration in popular cinema throughout much of the twentieth century. As I associate the film aesthetics to be outlined in chapter II with postmodernism, I have to underline, however, that the films to be discussed here—Kutluğ Ataman’s Turkish-German queer drama *Lola and Billy the Kid* (1999), Leander Haußmann’s GDR comedy *Sonnenallee* (Sun Alley, 1999) and Wolfgang Becker’s internationally acclaimed counterpart *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003)—are more interested in the (playful) making than in the deconstructive unmaking of history. Programmatically combining theatricalization with narrative integration, they show that a theatricalized aesthetics does not equal the prioritizing of self-reflexivity over other forms of sense-making often associated with postmodern culture. Instead, I demonstrate how these techniques of narrative performance redevelop—rather than merely contest—narrative authority in enabling the process of (more or less critical) reconfiguration conceptualized above. Crucially, their divergent effects depend on the specific combination and contextual deployment of various forms of theatrical narration in the individual films, ranging from the genre aesthetics of melodrama and comedy to montage, voice-over, and metalepsis.

While film has been theorized as a ‘mixed’ medium in itself, the aesthetics of narrative performance can be developed for the medium of literature by looking at its programmatically intermedial affiliations in the contemporary age. Chapter III begins with the figuration of the so-called new pop literature—new as opposed to its avant-garde–affiliated predecessors in the 1960s—which arguably dominated the German literary scene, and certainly its representation in the feuilletons, around 2000. (Although not all of the texts discussed in this chapter have been classified as pop ‘proper,’ I argue that they can be located in its poetological vicinity.) The controversies around these texts underscore the degree to which the traditional medium of literature has been the focus of postunification demands for the creation of collective identity in the *Kulturnation*. Generally described as ‘performative,’ the new pop develops its challenge to dominant concepts of ‘high’ literature—and authoritative narrative—specifically through a radical development of scenic narration, or techniques of presence, as indicated by its diary formats, its poetic affiliations with new media aesthetics, photography, hip-hop, and visual performance, and its variously backgrounded or disoriented narrators. Thus, media-specific trajectories compete—rather than ally themselves—with
the overall prominence of theatricality paradigms across the larger cultural landscape of the 1990s here. However, the influence of these theatricality paradigms is visible in the ways in which the analyzed texts simultaneously explore techniques of self-reflexivity and epic distancing, resulting in intricate configurations of im/mediated intensity. Poetologically detailing these configurations, I show how Rainald Goetz’s Internet diary *Abfall für Alle* (Trash for all, 1999), Feridun Zaimoğlu’s *Kanak Sprak* (Kanak Speech 1995), Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde* (Strange Stars Are Staring to Earth, 2003) and Juli Zeh’s successful debut *Adler und Engel* (*Eagles and Angels*, 1999) each develop their own distinct challenges to hegemonic demands for authoritative literary identity constitution and the memory culture of postunification Germany.

Equipped with more state funding than its international counterparts, German art theater overall insisted on its distance from the—variously: ‘popular’ and ‘literary’—worlds of narrative at the turn of the twenty-first century. Because of this strength of avant-garde–inflected, also primarily presence-based conceptualizations of performance, chapter IV begins at the (transnational and popular) margins of the contemporary theater scene, where an interplay of presence- and theatricality-affiliated forms has been variously developed in programmatically narrative form. My readings of “This is not about sadness,” a script fragment by Nigerian German, London-based performance artist Olumide Popoola, and of a (primarily commercial) Berlin adaptation of Doug Wright’s and Moisés Kaufman’s 2003 Broadway success *I Am My Own Wife* about an East German transvestite and Secret Service informant develop the analysis of such presence-theatricality interplay in the theater context. Specifically, I discuss how Popoola’s African diaspora–inflected techniques of onstage narration and call and response productively interrogate notions of (theatrical and social) community. For the sake of an all-too-facile audience community experience, in contrast, the transatlantic move of *I Am My Own Wife* displaces Wright’s and Kaufman’s empathy-based investigation of authority in autobiographical performance with a presentified queer spectacle of transvestism. Moving on to the center of radical German theater experimentation, the second part of chapter IV then traces how the project of narrative explicitly resurfaces in René Pollesch’s 2003–4 *Zeltsaga* (Tentsaga) tetralogy, in response to the discontents having developed in Pollesch’s own antinarrative, insistently decontextualizing aesthetics. At the intersection of post-Brechtian critique and the serial poetics of Brazilian telenovelas, the tetralogy explores new forms of egalitarian world-making with its highly original techniques of affective commentary, epic mimesis, and phenomenological figuration.
As chapters II through IV thus unfold various techniques of narrative performance through a focus on individual media, they also concentrate on a particular cultural moment in that they explore dominant forms around the year 2000. In chapters V and VI, finally, I discuss the emergence of new trends since then. The starting point of this investigation is the claim—variously articulated by cultural critics—that September 11, 2001, marked a decisive break in the cultural landscape, bringing the end of pleasure-oriented pop culture, flamboyant cinematic comedy, and the deconstructive splatter aesthetics of avant-garde theater, in favor of a return to 'narrative,' morality, religion, and political commitment in the sphere of art (see, e.g., McBride 86). As indicated by the fuzziness of my timeline—a number of works discussed in chapters II to IV were produced after September 11—I qualify this claim as too simple. In part, the critics’ rhetoric of rupture suggests that September 11 has been used as a topos in ongoing debates about politics, ethics, and aesthetics, whose pre–September 11 enactments included discussions about the end of postmodernism as early as in the 1990s. Nonetheless, I argue that the aesthetic forms discussed in chapters V and VI do in fact signal shifts in the cultural landscape, even if these are in some respects more appropriately labeled as shifts from the episteme and aesthetics of the 1990s to that of the 2000s. Importantly, these shifts cannot be summarized as a move from performance to narrative; rather, they foreground different techniques of narrative performance.

While chapters V and VI move beyond a focus on media-specific categories, the diverging trends explored in them have nonetheless been dominantly associated with literature and visual media, respectively, attesting to the relative media-specificity of aesthetic developments in cultural context. Thus, chapter V overall focuses on the return of 'larger' novels and authoritative, presumably 'omniscient' forms of literary narration that have displaced the dominantly scenic aesthetics of pop and related forms discussed in chapter III. My central claim, however, concerns the actual poetological hybridity of this trend, which has been coshaped by both 'leftover' postmodernist theatricality and the new century's interest in presence. Thus, I demonstrate how in Zeh's 2004 novel Spieltrieb (Playdrive), the programmatic return to 'God'-like form remains haunted by an ambiguously legitimizing and deauthorizing game of theatricalization, and how Nobel Prize winner Elfriede Jelinek's 2003 theater text Bambiland fuses scenic with 'god(like)' narration in the chorus monologue through which it restages the Iraq war. Here, I venture on intermedial terrain as I compare the text with two theater productions: Christoph Schlingensief’s (almost text-free but intermedially congenial) premiere at the Vienna Burgtheater and Dimiter Gotscheff’s 2006 production of Jelinek's
intertext, *The Persians*. The latter, I argue, develops a narrative challenge to divine authority—as the performative fundament of war ideology—through the experiential authority of the messenger’s scenic evocation of war suffering. The chapter’s concluding reading, of Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), more fully conceptualizes such a human alternative to ‘heavenly’ authoritative narrative. At first glance rather a parody of authoritative narration, the highly theatricalized as well as highly scenic narration of Foer’s child narrator unfolds as an ambitious project of sense-making, which becomes increasingly adequate as a result of learning and dialogicity and thus offers readers a nonsovereign alternative to God’s power in narratively working through the trauma of September 11.

Finally, chapter VI tackles a complementary trend that I locate primarily in visual media. Often discussed in terms of ‘new realism,’ film and theater of the 2000s have increasingly departed from the theatrical techniques of the 1990s. While in mainstream contexts this shift has occasionally been combined with a return to authoritative forms, it has more characteristically been developed through the dominant use of presencing techniques: as an aesthetics of proximity. For the context of theater, I chart its contours in the emergence of new documentary forms: Feridun Zaimoğlu and Neco Çelik’s *Schwarze Jungfrauen* (Black Virgins) presents monologues by Muslim women identifying with radical positions, and Andres Veiel’s *Der Kick* investigates a neo-Nazi murder in the East German provinces. A surrender of narrative authority, their aesthetics of proximity produces disturbing affective encounters with the first-person testimonies on stage. In the realm of film, the new forms began to crystallize in works of the so-called Berlin School that have replaced the playfully theatricalizing aesthetics of the turn-of-the-century productions discussed in chapter II with a sober analytics of observation and a new programmatic interest in presence. Christian Petzold’s *Yella* explores a radically phenomenological approach, which brackets coherence and demands that spectators develop their own stories—however, with a classically narrative twist. In line with U.S. productions on September 11 and the War on Terror from *United 93* to *The Hurt Locker*, finally, Brigitte Bertele’s 2008 *Nacht vor Augen* (*A Hero’s Welcome*) develops the aesthetics of presence as a way of aligning its audiences with the experiences of trauma, affectively bringing the war home to its spellbound audiences.