Political Performance: A Framework for Analysing Democratic Politics

Shirin M. Rai

University of Warwick

This article develops a framework to examine the co-constitutive nature of performance and politics and to suggest that such a framework is critical to promoting an interdisciplinary approach to understanding our complex political world. It does this by disaggregating the component parts of political performance and suggesting how, once these are made visible, we are able to reflect upon more complex processes of its re-aggregation into our analysis of politics. The framework is constituted along two axes – one that maps individual performance, which is nevertheless socially embedded; and the other that charts the political effects of performance. The framework allows us to reflect upon social and political institutions, movements and events and analyse these through the prism of performance and politics. The empirical core of the article is the Indian parliament.

Keywords: performance; parliament; representation; audience

'Cleggmania. ... One sure-footed TV performance, and the Lib Dem leader [Nick Clegg] has transformed the election campaign,' headlined *The Independent* in April 2010 (Merrik, 2010). Several things contributed to this performance: he took the time to rehearse his presentation; he had a clear message – a challenge to a two-party system that is failing the electorate; he spoke to the audience – both in the room and through television – by calling people by their first names and by looking directly into the cameras; and his delivery of the Clegg/Lib Dem package came across as credible – he was seen as 'sincere', without political artifice. His performance built on public cynicism of politicians but went further with glimpses of a positive alternative (Merrik, 2010). The performance worked; it convinced his audiences, invoked new audiences and delivered at the ballot box a result that few would have expected before that first debate. Did Clegg's performance alone make possible this seismic shift in British politics? Has the impact been a lasting one? Of course, the political backdrop to this performance cannot be overlooked, but it did underline the fact that performance matters in and to politics. Perhaps it is because the role of performance is so often overlooked in political analysis that the effect of Clegg's performance surprised many students of British politics.

I have been studying the importance of ceremony and ritual in parliament, through which we can trace the circulation of meanings, the particularity of institutional cultures and the sedimentation of power in political institutions (Rai, 2010). This alerted me to the importance of performance in and to politics, which can be broadly defined as the distribution of power, and, specifically, how the changes over time in the social profile of parliaments[1] are reflected in the political performances conducted within them. In this article I develop a framework for reading political performance in institutional politics – in this case, the social organisation of governance such as parliaments[2] (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). In this context I define the term 'political performance' as those performances that

seek to communicate to an audience meaning-making related to state institutions, policies and discourses. This meaning-making is read in very specific socio-political contexts; it can be either consolidative or challenging of the dominant narratives of politics. The performance can be situated inside buildings that host political institutions or in the public spaces that surround them – the public sphere is then the stage of political performance. The script of political performance bridges the public and the private; indeed in this way it mobilises political traction – the rhetoric about the family, care and sexuality, for example, is routinely brought into focus to make arguments about citizenship, the welfare state and political rights. To be effective, meaning-making has to be seen to be, in J. L. Austin's (1975) words, 'felicitous'. Its legitimacy rests on a convincing performance; it has to be representative of a particular political stand; it must engage the audience that is its particular target; it should satisfy the formal rules, rituals and conventions of the institutions through which the meaning is being projected; and be received as logical and coherent. Because much of this performance can be challenged by disruption of the performance itself through counter-performance, mis-recognition or mis-reading of and by the audience, political performance is inherently unstable and vulnerable to being seen as illegitimate. Thus, I am also interested in moments of performance when something that ought not to have been felicitous in the 'normal' course of politics becomes so and emerges in the form of a change in the grammar of performance. Political performance is critical to our reading of politics itself.

However, in order to read a political performance we need to understand its component parts as well as the whole performance and its effects. In this article I develop a political performance framework (PPF), which I suggest can be usefully employed to study political processes and institutions such that the separation between the 'how' and the 'what' of politics is bridged and is always seen as imbricated and co-constitutive. I illustrate this by reading some moments/events/spaces through the lens of the framework I present. The case selection of empirical material presented here makes no claim for representativeness; rather, I share these examples of performance in the Indian parliament as readings that have provoked me to reflect upon performance of and in institutional politics.

It is useful to hold parliament as the object of study in developing this framework because it is the institutional space where the performance of representation – a concept at the heart of any democratic system – goes on in symbolic and literal ways. In democratic systems, members of parliament not only represent citizens, they also claim collectively to mirror the society and nation at large. They not only make laws and hold the executive accountable, but they also make a 'representative claim' (Saward, 2006) to represent different constituencies, identity groups and interests. If this claim is seen as valid – through the shaping of parliamentary membership by regular, free and fair elections, for example – then the parliament, and indeed the country, is seen to be democratic; if the representativeness of parliament is disputed, it can result in apathy and cynicism. Issues of identity, representativeness, legitimacy and authenticity are important here. While there is a rich literature in the field of political science on democratic representation and claim-making (Norval, 2000; Pitkin, 1967; Saward, 2010), very little work has been done on *how* these representative claims are made and what makes them legitimate – and even this is largely spun off from institutional practices and norms. Overlooking the processes through which

democratic practice takes shape is a serious limitation to our understanding of representative politics; it is a gap in democratic theory that this article will attempt to fill.

We become aware of representative politics through the mode of performance[3] in which individuals and institutions (actors) make claims to represent and affect their audience (the represented). Claims of representativeness are complex to make, to stabilise and to have accepted generally. Unlike factual claims – say, for example, 'I am a British citizen; I have a British passport' – a claim to 'Britishness' is a claim that encapsulates a particular understanding of identity politics, political history, a social positioning that is recognisably inscribed in the public imaginary and a relational matrix which might place 'the British' in contrast to 'the Other'. When Judith Butler (1990; emphasis in original) famously invoked Simone de Beauvoir's claim that, 'one is not born, but, rather, *becomes a* woman', and argued that '[i]n this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*', she suggested that gendered power reproduces itself through repeated acts (rituals) that have an affective resonance, thereby normalising particular gender orders.

Butler's framing of the reproduction of power relations through the concept of performativity while critical, does not in itself allow us to deconstruct the performances that make for the stylised repetitions. Nor does it allow us to analyse why and how some performances mark a rupture in the everyday reproduction of social relations. This article focuses on the 'performance' rather than the 'performativity' (although the two are co-constitutive) of everyday politics in institutions such as parliament. It argues that these performances – even when policy-driven – reflect, resist and refurbish existing and shifting power relations. The repertoires of performance that we have access to and their recognition/reception as legitimate are influenced by the broad social relations of class and gender, ethnicity and language – by the *habitus* that shapes our choices (Bourdieu, 2008). I explore whether a focus on performance allows us to ask different questions about political legitimacy, claim–making and representation – specifically *how* claims of representativeness are made by both institutions and individuals and with what effects.

Jeffrey Alexander (2006, pp. 32–7) has outlined a cultural pragmatics of social performance that underlines not its materiality, but its performance. It focuses on the travel from ritual to performance and back again – from 'de-fusion' to 're-fusion' of performative elements that make for stories that are powerful and fundamentally believable. My argument is different: that the materiality of performance allows us to reflect upon its power. By disaggregating the various elements of performance we can assess how political actors – individual and institutional – harness material bodies, rituals and ceremonies, sounds and voices with great effort and labour to generate a political syntax that is both accepted and challenged by different audiences; and how the interactions between performance and its reception generate politics. I will show how this disaggregation of performance through a PPF works along two axes. On one axis we can map the markers of representation: the body, the space/place, words/script/speech and performative labour. Together, these four markers encapsulate political performance. On the second axis we can map the effects of performance: authenticity, mode of representation, liminality and resistance (of and to) political representation. PPF also analyses

the interaction between political performers and their audience – actors anticipate an audience, bring it into play, respond to its reaction, shape and reshape the performance in the light of their reading of the audience and many times make the audience part of the performance. The audience can also bring particular performances into being – through insisting on performance of political rituals, for instance (Finlayson, 2014). In this way, the relationship between the audience and the performer is a dialectical one: it is the interaction between the two that gives performance its affect. PPF suggests that while actors perform representation, they do not do so in a vacuum – social relations embed them as cultural histories, political economy, everyday norms and rituals. So, PPF insists that social relations are mediated through performance – understood, imbibed, interpreted, made visible, resisted or, alternatively, taken for granted, as read.

In building this framework my approach draws upon a rich tradition of critical thought: neo-Marxist literature on the reproduction of class hegemony through cultural practices (Adorno, 1978; Gramsci, 1971) as well as later theories of the 'standardisation of tastes' under globalisation (Appadurai, 1990; Debord, 1994). Michel Foucault's (1979) work on modes of disciplining is critical to our understanding of the reproduction and circulation of power and the discursive reach of ideas. I also build on ideas of contemporary commodification of both the material world and the world of experience and perception where the spectacular comes to re-present the 'real', the material and the experiential (Debord, 1994), reproducing social hegemony. PPF also reflects a concern to hold together state forms as culturally produced and 'cultural forms as state regulated' (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985) as well as feminist concerns about the gendered nature of political institutions, norms and social performances, rituals and everyday practices (Krook and Mackay, 2011; Rai, 2010; Crewe, 2005; Butler, 1990).

The sociological, and social anthropology literature on political ritual (Durkheim, 2001; Geertz, 1960) has influenced my decision to examine everyday parliamentary rituals as well as the casting of hyper-visible state ceremonies, including how these might be studied (Goffman, 1971) as embedded performances (Bourdieu, 2008) and the affect and effects they produce (Turner, 1970). However, I have been constantly aware of how these authorising performances which awe audiences, invoke subjectivities and circulate and reproduce performative power are always contestable and contested (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985). In understanding this I have drawn upon post-colonial literature, which analyses how the experience of colonialism and the emergence of the 'post-colony' affect representation, politics and performance as well as the reading of these by the 'Other' – i.e. Western audiences (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1997; Mbembe, 1992; Said, 1979; Spivak, 1988). Finally, the work of theatre and performance theorists, which focuses on how the dynamic processes of transformation and consolidation of power are transacted in public through specific acts, roles, scenarios and effects, has been extremely useful in the development of my framework (Edkins and Kear, 2013; Reinelt, 2011; Roach, 1996; Schechner, 2006).

While taking on board this rich tradition of thought on performance and performativity, I suggest that the work on claim-making can be taken further into the study of specific political institutions in order to assess what happens when 'performativity meets history'. Why do some performances 'foment dissensus' and make 'visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure' while others do the opposite (Mouffe, 2007, p. 3)? What

happens when contexts of institutions that have their own rules and processes of what counts as felicitous meet disruptive performances in agonistic spaces (Mouffe, 2007)?

The structure of the article is as follows. The next two sections outline PPF through its two axes before presenting the role that an audience plays in receiving, interpreting and affecting performance. The article then goes on to illustrate how the PPF analytics can help us read institutional and individual performance using examples from the Indian parliament. The conclusion reflects upon the affect and effects of performance and claim-making in and through political representation.

The Political Performance Framework
The first axis of PPF with four intersecting elements reflects as well as gives form to social relations in the performance of representation:

The Body In/On View
Performance is embodied. As Diana Coole (2007, p. 413) has argued: 'Since democratic processes tend to rely on situations where face-to-face encounters occur, the way bodies affect communication is especially important for understanding [social] exclusion.' The body alerts us to the somatic norms – the corporeal standards – that operate within political institutions (Puwar, 2004). The presence of different bodies in institutional spaces challenges the operative institutional somatic norms. Bodies in and out of place can be more or less affective as well as effective as they are read as 'coded text' which 'attend[s] to complex politics of representation' (Anagnost, 2004, p. 192). In conceptualising the body, I understand it as being embedded in social relations – it is positioned in relation to other bodies, which are historically specific, culturally framed and affect the ways in which bodies are viewed, represent/are represented, consent and resist. This enables or disables political performers' ability to re-present to, as well as to represent, their constituents, their interests and, indeed, themselves. This focus on the body allows us to bring into focus the materiality of the human condition (Bordo, 1993; Coole and Frost, 2010) and to reflect upon power relations circulating within institutions. Reading bodies through their dress, voice, words and gestures alerts us to how are they marked by signs of power or marginality. How identity is performed reveals the layered identities of political actors. It also invokes new identities in the making. Sex, colour, caste, class or sexuality all play out differently in bodily performances and their reception.

Staging Representation
The body on view does not perform in a vacuum; it does so in space/place/time, which are co-constituted as the performance takes form. The backdrop, the stage, the symbols, the entry and exit points shape the kind of politics that is performed, the shifts and struggles that take place – who constructs, reflects, claims and polices the space of politics. At the same time, the performing body also brings the stage into being by occupying it, speaking from it and creating an aesthetic marking it. In other words, it matters whether claim-making takes place in or outside state buildings, particular event spaces or historical non-state spaces. But it matters not only in a functionalist sense – its appropriateness in

terms of acoustics, for example, or even in its reflection of the culture in which political institutions such as parliaments are embedded, but in terms of the re-presentation of statehood, sovereignty and legitimacy through architecture, political objects, props and symbols (Goodsell, 1988; Parkinson, 2012; Rai, 2014). It allows us to ask different questions about political institutions and their place in our past and present readings of national histories. Henri Lefebvre's admonition that we take 'into account localities and regions, differences and multiple (conflictual) associations, attached to the soil, to dwelling, the circulation of people and things, in the practical functioning of space' allows us to see how the changing social and political relations find spatial reflection within representative buildings, as new 'space invaders' (cited in Brenner and Elden, 2009, p. 360; Puwar, 2004) make demands for visual representation through portraits and statues of different bodies. A stage has a 'front' and 'back'. If the performance takes place front stage, back stage is where the performance also takes shape, out of sight. Scripts are written, directorial decisions made and performances polished. Backstage is a busy and important space, which requires critical scrutiny precisely because of its invisibility; the 'gaze is integral to systems of power and ideas about knowledge' (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009, p. 94) and produces self-regulating subjects. Front and back stage, affect and effect then work together to make staging/space of representation representative or unrepresentative, open or closed, accessible or inaccessible, protected or vulnerable – from which, as in the example of the Ladies Room discussed below, are read the tropes of democratic practice.

Auditory Power of Words/Scripts/Speech/Voice

Focusing on speech acts, Austin (1975, p. 7) noted that: 'The uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even the leading incident in the performance of the act [and] the performance of which is also the object of the utterance.' Speech acts are thus self-actuating in this 'thin' version of performativity. As we have seen above, however, Butler (1997, p. 5) sees words and their repetition as bringing into being as well as regulating and challenging power and its effects. Words '[b]oth sustain and threaten the body through modes of address'. Declarations and rhetoric – institutional and individual – require scripts and speech, which are learned and re-produced for affect, but which also have effects in the Austinian sense (Finlayson, 2012). While much has been written about speech acts we could, by bringing into view embodied identities, also analyse the voice in which these acts are made – well modulated, 'cultured' accents as opposed to those voices deemed 'shrill' (on grounds of gender) or 'rough' (on grounds of class/caste). Voices and bodies elide here. Voices can also mark appropriateness of political claim-making, of how some voices are more appropriate or where practices of listening invoke voice (Ranciere, 2011; Spivak, 1988). We could then read both the affect and effect of voice(s) that occupy spaces – shouting interrupts institutional processes in parliament, producing sounds. This conception of voice is of course different from 'voice' as representative of points of view, sensibilities or self-identifications. However, it is not unrelated as its materiality invokes a reading of social relations. Sound also allows us to read politics – sound often 'territorialises' spaces. People protest outside institutional buildings to create a din in the distance as a reminder of their protest, even while the actual words might not be intelligible. Similarly, institutions use sounds to discipline and call attention to something (e.g. the speaker's gavel

and the bell to call MPs to the chamber). They also use national anthems, songs and bands to proclaim the nation and represent unity among different peoples that constitute the nation.

Performing and Performative Labour

Labour produces value. 'Striving', 'effort', 'working', 'toil' are all words that describe labour. Labour is also related to 'production', which transforms raw materials into profitable goods and services, and the terms of its exchange also define privilege and marginality. When we analyse performance and it effects we often overlook the labour that goes into performing (Schapiro, 2014, p. 271). If we agree that institutional norms reflect dominant social relations and that the *habitus* of some provides them with greater resources to draw upon when performing, then the issue of performative labour becomes critical. As suggested by the opening vignette of Nick Clegg's performance in the election debates, what performers seek to get across is a message – and all aspects of their person are harnessed to do so. But performing in public comes more easily to some than others. Members of political families, for example, or those who have gone to elite educational institutions where public speaking is encouraged have the privilege of formal and informal, normalised and ritualised training in public performing. Others – the outsiders, 'strangers' and 'space invaders' in institutional spaces – have to learn the 'tricks of the trade', to put in hours of work, endure heightened levels of anxiety and self-doubt as often their personality, identity and sometimes even body shape is refashioned to communicate their claims. Mapping performative labour is difficult – how we learn varies from informal training in households to formal institutional or on-the-job training. Rehearsal time is also dependent upon social relations – women responsible for domestic work, for example, would find setting aside time for rehearsing more difficult than those men who do not contribute so much to domestic work; people with disabilities might find it more tiring to put in hours of rehearsal/training. By focusing on performative labour we can factor in the human costs of performance. The smoothness of performance, of course, has implications for its reception, but its costs can also be counted in the lengthening of the working day, numbers of unsuccessful careers in politics and in the ridicule of audiences as those less privileged try to make their way in politics.

Mapping Political Performance: The Second Axis

Performance needs to be effective. Below, I suggest that effectiveness of political performance can be analysed through four concepts. First there is the *authenticity of representation* – political actors claim to represent, and citizens expect them to represent populations, constituencies and identities, through the membership of which political claims are made or rejected (Saward, 2009). The question that is important here is whether these claims to represent, when performed, are seen to be authentic. Performances deemed to be authentic carry legitimacy and authority; performers give authenticity to performances through their assuredness, their conformity with the somatic norm, their sense of entitlement to the cultural landscape in which they perform, and therefore to the social relations they reflect. They also perform to legitimise challenges to these social relations. The performative smoothness in either case is important to its legitimacy. Alexander (2006, p. 7) argues that

'authenticity is an interpretive category rather than an ontological state [and is] arrived at, is contingent and results from processes of social construction'; it is also always contested, unstable and open to re-interpretation. Can anyone re-present and represent another authentically? Is this always relative to the positionality of the representative and represented? Gayatri Spivak's (1988) answer to the question she famously posed – 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' – was that the subaltern cannot speak when represented by others, but that we can still point to the space of that absence to be politically alert to the inequalities of voice. Social relations then are stabilised through performance that is deemed to be authentic. Performance and its reception, therefore, play a critical part in bolstering legitimacy and authority.

Second is the issue of the *mode of representation*, which is framed within recognisable cultural narratives and symbols. As Clifford Geertz (1960) emphasised, through performances we tell stories to ourselves and others about ourselves and about others. Stories make meaning. This meaning-making, of course, does not as Jerry Bruner (1996) has so well argued, take place in a vacuum – it is interactional, it allows for an awareness of alternative meanings and scripts, and it is framed within common cultural narratives and symbols. In the context of colonial modes of representation, Homi Bhabha (1983, p. 22) has called the colonial stereotype (a particular form of meaning-making) a 'complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself'. Bruner's constructivist understanding of learning to perform allows him to suggest that individuals learn through action-based representation, iconic or image-based representation, and through symbolic or language-based representation. However, although Bruner sees language-based representation as the more sophisticated of the three, he regards these modes of representation as only loosely integrated and sequential. Words as well as scripts matter. Our recognition of these words and our use of scripts, formal or informal, matters because it shapes our representation of our and others' subjectivities. But we do not represent just with words; non-verbal communicative modes (e.g. the clothes and ornaments that we wear, our gestures) of recognition and greeting as well as of overlooking (blanking) also re-present (Goffman, 1971). Learning to perform is of course also historically embedded and therefore social in character – training manuals and courses are one source of learning, but so is our *habitus*, our social and political histories. Individuals might choose from a bundle of scripts or meanings; the bundle however, remains historically specific and choice then is framed by the subject's *habitus*, by both their social and their institutional worlds (Bourdieu, 2008).

Third is the *moment of liminality*, a threshold when political actors are in a space/place/ time when disruption of the stable is possible. Anthropologist Victor Turner (1970, p. 97) defined 'liminality' as a 'threshold' between these two different existential planes, 'a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise'. Thus, while performance can consolidate power, because 'performances precipitate degrees of liminality, they are [also] capable of transforming social relations' (Alexander, 2006, p. 13). Turner outlines key elements of liminality as the middle part of ritual, a state of 'no longer being classified'; it is through the completion of rituals prescribed by the social group that individuals are able to leave this liminal stage and become reintegrated into the social

system. This in-between space/place/time is often modelled on 'processes of gestation and parturition' and regarded as dangerous (Douglas, 1966) because it defies classificatory limits (Turner, 1970, p. 97).[4] Although Turner (1970, p. 100) does not make this explicit, the state of liminality also suggests danger, perhaps because it flattens out the social hierarchies within which individuals are situated. This can allow members of the group to be in a stage of reflection outside the normal boundaries of socially constructed and accepted rituals, facts, ideas and sentiments; deconstruction of the dominant configurations of ideas and practices becomes possible as ritualised enactments of belonging are seen not as a whole, but as its constituent parts (Turner, 1970, p. 105). There is thus in liminal time 'a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence' (Turner, 1970, p. 106). While some scholars have stretched the liminal moment – even enough to call it 'permanent liminality' (Szakolczai, 2000), I would like to hold on to the temporariness of the concept in the context of representative performances (Phelan, 1993) because an over-drawing of political effects from specific performances overlooks the tethering of performance and its reception to the existing social relations; the performative rupture, as Turner points out, has fairly narrow limits. Once the liminal moment passes political actors often become once more subject to custom and law, but sometimes in that moment a more lasting rupture can occur.

Finally, we evidence *resistance to claim-making*. Some claims are accepted, others neglected and still others mocked or rejected outright – by audiences, commentators and reviewers. Resistance to representative claim-making takes different forms. First, demonstrations and disruptions of political proceedings are the clearest mobilisation of resistance to political performance. Second, resistance is manifested, in Bhabha's words, through 'mimicry', which is also 'menace' – where hegemonic codes are challenged, but through words that are recognised by the hegemon; narratives are subverted in the language that is dominant; scripts are revised in often small registers that are significant in their revisions of familiar texts (Alexander, 2006, p. 15). Third, resistance can take a more passive form – overlooking, ignoring, disregarding, not paying attention to the performance or staging of political spectacles can also be read as oppositional; it undermines the dominant discourse and creates wrinkles in the smooth narrative of power. Finally, humour is often used to resist power's narrative:

> [T]he subject's deployment of a talent for play and a sense of fun which makes him *homo ludens* par excellence ... enables subjects to splinter their identities and to represent themselves as constantly changing their persona; they ... constantly [undergo] mitosis, whether it be in 'official' spaces or not (Mbembe, 1992, p. 6).

The claim to representation is often challenged through cartoons, the telling of jokes and teasing those who make such claims (Shehata, 1992, p. 75).[5]

Thus far we have said nothing about who the performance is for. There is an old saying in Hindi: 'The peacock danced in the forest? Who saw him?' If there is no audience then can there be a performance? But what constitutes the audience of a political performance? How do the audience of and its reception affect the performance itself? What social relations come into view through studying the reception of a political performance? I will now discuss this important aspect of PPF.

The Audience of Political Performance

'In *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook states: "The only thing that all forms of theatre have in common is the need for an audience ... in the theatre the audience completes the steps of creation' (in Loxley, 1983, p. 40). But what is an audience – and specifically, an audience for political performance? Baz Kershaw (2007, p. 224) notes that it was in the Victorian era that spectators gave way to the audience:

> [T]heatre attendees were encouraged to think of themselves as a collective paying attention to sound, particularly to words, rather than as individuals primed to enjoy the delights of scopophilic excess. A parallel shift ... in the term for the audience's space, from 'spectatory' to 'auditorium' underlines the point.

The interaction between the audience and the performers is critical to our judgement of the merits – long- and short-term – of the performance. In terms of the audience of parliamentary representatives, it is the constituents – or more broadly citizens – as well as other institutional actors. Unlike a theatre audience, citizens or constituents are not necessarily present as audience; performances in political institutions are carried out for both the audience present – 'the empirically present listeners' – and the 'ghostly audiences' outside the spatial parameters of performance (Langellier, 1999, p. 127). The performance-audience relation is also complex. Does the political actor in parliament speak to her own benches/party members or to the opposition or her constituency? Is the political performance trying to persuade 'the other' or does its effectiveness have another audience altogether – those that are important to future rewards through promotion, for example? The technologies of communication allow for different/absent audiences to be reached through various routes – social media in particular has allowed the distinctions between public and private performance to be blurred. The unfamiliar yet imperative engagement with this media has resulted in many a *faux pas* by politicians, and the mobilisation of bias through real-time reviews of performance makes for more unmediated, swift and wide-ranging effects. Political performances then have to be carefully calibrated to link macro- to micro-politics such that audiences present and absent can read off the performance the actor's story. The reaching out and the reading of performance depends as much on the text or the political narrative being performed as on invoking and harnessing many audiences. It also depends on the ability of the performer to read the audience, to re-calibrate the performance as it unfolds in response to reception indicators of/from the audience.

But how do these interlocutors, the audience, receive, decode and respond to political performance? Despite the focus on resistance, much of the work on reception suggests that the 'reading' of the performance by an audience is done largely with the familiar – what Wittgenstein calls 'family resemblances', easily available 'dominant' codes rather than those that are unfamiliar and against the grain, which is how power is reproduced. Indeed, political ceremony and ritual are performed in order to reproduce the codes of power necessary for stabilising social relations (Rai, 2010). However, counter-performances reflect the challenge that is posed to the hegemonic narratives of politics – what Chantal Mouffe (2007) would call an 'agonistic politics'. A performance that is able to effect change does so because the audience responds to an invitation to transformation and in so doing

Table 1: Performative Claim-making in Democratic Systems

The body Space/place/stage Words/Scripts/Speech/Voice Performing/performative labour	*	*	*	*
RECEPTION / AUDIENCE	Authenticity of representation	Mode of representation	Representative liminality	Resistance to representation

The boxes represent the different aspects of this framework that can be combined to empirically research how claims are made.

co-creates an alternative politics. The interpretive hermeneutics of political performance is critically dependent upon the relationship between the performer and the audience. But this relationship is mediated by the 'priests' of the public space – the media, the commentators, the journalists, the writers and the dramaturges – and underpinning this activity of discernment are the social relations of ownership, funding and legitimation of some rather than other voices of judgement (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005).

Table 1 visualises the two axes of PPF outlined above.

In the next section I analyse three stories from the Indian parliament[6] and employ the PPF framework to do so. I do not make any claims for representativeness of these examples; rather I simply illustrate how PPF might help us to uncover aspects of political performance in political institutions that are usually overlooked in our analysis.

Illustrating PPF: Stories of Institutional Performance

Instead of starting with a meta-theory, PPF begins with actual performances and asks questions about why these performances are as they are, and what made them possible and others impossible. From this close analysis, wider political processes can be theorised.

Words/Scripts/Speech/Voice: Mimicry and Menace

Lalu Prasad Yadav MP was the President of the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Indian Minister of Railways from 2004 to 2009. In 2008, while presenting the railway budget, he read a poem, which he first recited in Hindi and then, as the opposition MPs from the southern states protested,[7] in heavily accented, broken English as follows:

> Everybody is appreciating that I have done tremendous work,
> Every year I have earned crores and crores [of rupees] everyday
> They are saying Lalu Yadav has planted a fruit tree
> Every year it will grow a mile to give fruit.

The house dissolved into merriment; the Speaker commented that after this performance 'there won't be any problems with the railways'. This recitation was posted on YouTube and attracted 36,595 hits. The comments of viewers both in and outside India (the absent audience) show embarrassment that an Indian government minister can play the fool in this way: 'Is that parliament or a chai [tea] shop??', wrote MrNoob49 (http://www.youtube .com/watch?v=Iwyc_E1hqTs).

This performance when seen through the prism of PPF allows us to reflect upon the claims to authenticity that politicians make, in the contexts that they make these claims, the histories that they invoke, and the audiences that interpret and either support such claim-making or reject it. Yadav comes from a poor, rural social background, is from a lower caste (OBC) and is not part of the Westernised political class that dominated the Indian parliament for decades. His performative presentation of self evokes not only his caste positionality, but also that of his class. He speaks in colloquial Hindi, the language of the 'common man', and subverts the dominant, Westernised political class through mimicry and humour that entertains as much as it menaces those in parliament. However, this performance has been laboured through much iteration – not all as successful every time. The labour that goes into a performance that treads the mimicry/menace/success boundaries so well is able to re-fuse the disaggregated elements of performance and in the moment take the present audience with it. His multiple audiences – inside and outside parliament – read his performance in different ways: the laughter inside parliament (where he is known and well liked) is at variance with the embarrassment of the diasporic audience elsewhere. In this performance, Yadav uses words to perform his class/caste, but also to underline his effectiveness – both as a minister (making a profit for the railways) and as a politician (able to connect with the rural and largely marginalised voice of the Indian, lower caste peasantry). In the context of the ongoing debates over caste and 'backwardness' in India, Yadav's insistence on performing effectiveness and identity together is particularly important – he is challenging the subtext of much of this debate about the quality of those who are inducted into parliament through quotas for the 'backward castes'. The connection that is made between the macro- and micro-politics through performance becomes visible by employing the prism of PPF.

Authenticity and the Body In/On View

Historically, women's bodies in the Indian parliament have been marginal bodies – there have been few female bodies in/on view but because of this they have been more visible. They have also been marked by class and caste – there have been more elite bodies than not. Recently, the issue of 'foreignness' was raised in relation to Mrs Sonia Gandhi, reminding us of what 'authentic' subjectivities are read off indigenous as opposed to foreign bodies. Female bodies in the Indian parliament are attired entirely in Indian dress – sari or salwar kamiz – while men sport both Western and regional dress. This marks women in different cultural registers of institutional politics from men.

Figures 1 and 2 are photographs of two influential women in Indian politics: Indira Gandhi and Sushma Swaraj – one the erstwhile Prime Minister, the second the leader of the opposition in the 15th parliament. The image of Mrs Gandhi reflects her elite background, while that of Swaraj emphasises her 'homeliness'. Mrs Gandhi looks rather aloof and stern; Sushma Swaraj wears a *bindi* and has *sindhur* in her hair, with which most married Hindu women would identify. The sophistication of Mrs Gandhi's saris was notable – her clothes reflected the occasion. During election campaigns she was dressed in cotton saris and full sleeve blouses, with her head covered. On state visits abroad, she was attired in silks, short-sleeved blouses and was perfectly coiffered.

Figure 1: Indira Gandhi   **Figure 2: Sushma Swaraj**

http://www.iloveindia.com/indian-heroes/shows-pictures   http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sushma_swaraj
.php?img=indira-gandhi-1.jpg   .jpg

This is what Swaraj had to say about the issue of identity and representation:

> [W]hile Mrs Gandhi was seen with respect and awe, an ordinary Indian woman didn't think that she could be like Mrs Gandhi. But when she sees me, she thinks that she, her daughter can become like me. This is my life-time achievement. ... Mrs Gandhi was a class apart. I am the woman next door; I have created this aspiration in the ordinary woman of India (Interview with the author, 2005).

The reception of this affect can be seen in the statements of OBC (lower caste) political (male) leaders:

> JD(U) veteran Sharad Yadav, a critic of the legislation to secure a quota of 33 per cent for women in parliament, asked in June 1997, 'Do you think these women with short hair can speak for women, for *our* women ...?' (*The Hindu*, 9 March 2010).

The body speaks class, religion and gender hierarchies; it generates politics. The performance of and through the body thus opens up new avenues of political analysis of representativeness and authenticity.

Changing Modes of Performance in Space/Place

In archival photographs of the Indian parliament we see one of the Ladies' Room (Figure 3). Here, we find all the accoutrements of a genteel existence that ladies were thought to require – a place of calm and of rest, with comfortable sofas and a dressing table at which to touch up the face before sallying forth into the world of men that lies just beyond. Not visible but also present are the day beds on which to take a siesta after lunch, and a kettle for making tea, and white cups and saucers embossed with the parliament's emblem. When women first entered parliament this was a busy room – to be in the 'other spaces' of Central Hall was not considered appropriate unless one's presence was necessary for an official engagement. Men occupied the Central Hall – they sat there to talk, to network and even to have their lunch. As the composition of parliament changed, more

women, younger women, more assertive women became visible within the parliamentary precincts and the Ladies Room fell into disuse. Today, it looks rather forlorn and dusty, with no evidence of occupancy during the session. Nowadays, both women and men congregate and network in the Central Hall.

Winston Churchill remarked that we shape buildings and then buildings shape us. Here we can also see the opposite. In this case, the ritual of gender segregation in parliament was not created; it was suggested through the presence of a gendered space. Through an interaction between what has been and is then negotiated, women in parliament have arrived at a different way of being in the parliamentary space; they have resisted the suggestion of separation. Undermining what was presented as a gendered space through non-use is a powerful way of resisting earlier social mores and developing new everyday political rituals. The focus on space also allows us to think about performance in a non-verbal way – it is the way in which bodies use or do not use space that is the focus here rather than the text or the acting out of text.

Performative Labour

> Sonia tried to learn how to speak in Hindi before taking the plunge into politics ... [she] seldom missed her homework. ... Once she was elected to parliament, the process of educating Sonia gained momentum with partymen vying to take up the assignment ... her first few months in parliament were most testing. ... As a Sonia aide said, 'Madam is a reticent person and she hated the intense public glare. She did not want to give the impression that Congress leaders were helping her. There used to be intense relief each time Parliament got adjourned' (Kidwai, 2009).

The fact that Sonia Gandhi had all the advantages of being part of India's premier political family must mediate anxiety as well as provide a buffer for her. The labour that went into

Figure 3: The Ladies' Room in the Indian Parliament, 1950s

Source: Indian parliamentary archives. This photograph has now been removed from the website of the Indian parliament.

her performance, nevertheless, was considerable. Those joining parliamentary politics with a *habitus* of un-privilege must find the process of performance not only difficult, but also anxiety-producing. They have to learn not only formal rules and regulations, but also the informal rituals of everyday institutional political life. A parliamentarian spends a lot of time with constituents, needs good oral and written communication skills, works long hours and is willing to travel and live away from home when required. All these attributes need to be worked at, budgeted for in time and effort in contexts of privilege and un-privilege and negotiated in terms of gendered roles (Rai, 2012). Political representatives are not born but are laboured for and over, with more or less resources, with greater or lesser effect. Given the masculinist institutional norms, women MPs find working within parliaments more laborious and difficult than men, and those from lower class/caste backgrounds particularly so. PPF allows us to see this through the analysis of performative labour.

Audience and Resistance to Representation

During the mobilisation against corruption in India by social activist Anna Hazare, the actor Om Puri had this to say about Indian MPs, who were refusing to accept Hazare's revisions to the Lok Pal Bill[8]: '*Aadhe se zyaada MP ganwaar hain …*' – they are illiterate, without an educated background and 'more than half are uncouth'; he feels 'ashamed when an IAS or IPS officer salutes a *ganwar* (uncultured) who is a *neta* (political leader)'. Actors who are able to occupy the space of popular imagination – social movement activists like Hazare, Bollywood actors like Puri, and highly visible journalists and academic commentators challenge, through these counter-performances, the representative claim of the MPs. But the audience-performance relationship here is more complex than it first appears. Hazare's mobilisation of the symbolic capital of Gandhi – white traditional clothes (*dhoti-kurta-topi*), hunger strike as a performative challenge to authority, the staging of public meetings – resonates with a citizenry exasperated by the failure of politicians to deliver good governance. At the same time, the expansion of a mediatised world, the televising of parliamentary proceedings and the packaging of these into news-bites for the 24/7 news channels has expanded the audience of MPs exponentially. The juxtaposition of images of disruption in parliament by elected representatives and the counter-performance of unelected but popular politicians or civic leaders poses interesting questions for us. In a country with low literacy rates this media-led re-presentation of members' performance becomes even more powerful. To be seen to be effective, MPs have to have been seen; to be seen very often they have to occupy parliamentary spaces that are of interest to the camera. While disruptive behaviour is not supposed to be televised, it often is, incentivising members to behave in ways that will get them noticed and therefore filmed. Scenes of disruption in parliamentary debates are packaged for the national audience as are observations made by commentators regretting the state of Indian democracy and public ethos. The subtext of the falling standard of discourse is often one that censures non-elite modes of speech, action and performance in parliament – the crude language, the loud voice, the interruptions, and the bodily aggression are communicative modes that the early urbane and sophisticated members would have found abhorrent. Complex reasons of disruptive performances are obfuscated through a public narrative of

dysfunctional democracy (see Spary and Rai, 2013). The audience-performance relationship is mediated, with complex results for Indian democracy: even as the issue of corruption became a civic issue, Hazare was soon to lose his lustre, leaving his supporters yet more cynical about politics.

Conclusion

I have argued that performance analysis highlights the role of affect in politics and helps us understand how political performances hold together disparate interests, histories and visions of the future, 'while at the same time embodying the possibilities of evolutionary, transgressive and disruptive change' (Rai, 2010, p. 287). Thus performance has both affect and effects. As Sara Ahmed (2004, p. 117) has argued, 'emotions play a crucial role in the "surfacing" of individual and collective bodies through the way in which emotions circulate between bodies and signs'. I have also argued that audiences/citizens first respond to political situations, politicians and policies through affect, and we hope to create affect when we either support or oppose these. We have also seen how the mediatisation of parliamentary proceedings is most often packaged in highly negative and emotive ways in the media, generating cynical sensibilities among the citizens and undermining the representative claim of democratic institutions.

Politics can best be analysed through a performative lens, which allows us to make judgements about the authenticity, legitimacy and liminality of both political claim-making and claim-makers. It does so by holding together in one frame – rather than separately – the body, stage, speech and performative labour that goes into institutional and individual performance through which claims are made. My illustrations from the Indian parliament allow us to study different but connected elements that go into a performance and by so doing let us read the power flows, circulations and disturbances that performance can generate. PPF allows us to note that even though political performance is tethered to recognisable social patterns, it is also dynamic and unstable – in part because of the interpretive mode of performance and in part because the moment of performance is itself inherently liminal and fluid. By analysing parliamentary or other political institutions through the lens of performance we are able to see the dynamic, the unexpected as well as the structural frames, allowing us a more nuanced analytical framework to study politics. We are also then able to review, assess and critique the claims that representatives make – taking note of who they are and how they represent themselves, their positionality, the spaces they occupy and are able or not able to command, and their relationship with their audiences in anticipating, framing or responding to their demands. What the examples from the Indian parliament illustrate is that highly codified rules of performance in parliament are interpreted by political actors to either build on ritualised power or to challenge or subvert it – through humour, rhetoric, occupation of some spaces and not others, and through dress and linguistic choices – invoking different identities that make connections with multiple audiences, both present and absent from the theatre of political institutions such as parliament. They also illustrate how PPF can help us uncover and read these interpretive moves. They do not, however, illustrate all different aspects of PPF axes; the idea is to show how different aspects of performative reading can be highlighted and meaning constructed through the prism of PPF.

PPF thus seeks to reveal the historical arch (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985) that connects deep political and discursive power to its immediate performance, showing that certain discourses, performances and representations find greater resonance, reception and recognition than others, depending upon the dominant ideas of historical time. The performance then becomes part of a repertoire with a long history of social relations. To map this theoretical framing of performance and representation is the task of PPF. A study of political performance then allows us to open up the field of political analysis at the level of individual and institutional representation to a more creative, connected and critical gaze.

About the Author

Shirin M. Rai is a Professor in the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick. She directed a Leverhulme Trust-funded programme on Gendered Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament (2007–11), which explored themes of political rituals, symbols and architecture in politics. Her research interests are in performance and politics, political institutions and the political economy of development. She is the author of *The Gender Politics of Development* (Zed Books/Zubaan, 2008) and editor of *Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament* (special issue of *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 2010). A co-edited book, *The Grammar of Politics and Performance* (Routledge) will be published in 2014. Shrin Rai, Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK; email: *shirin.rai@warwick.ac.uk*

Notes

1 The programme analysed the Indian, South African and UK parliaments. See http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/gcrp/

2 However, I hope PPF can also help with analyses of the performance repertoires of social movements and the politics of the everyday.

3 I use the terms 'performance' and 'performativity' in the following ways: Performance is an action or event that is relational, reflexive and self-conscious (Schechner, 2006); performativity is a philosophical term, following J. L. Austin and Judith Butler, to mark the efficacy, success or failure of performance at achieving its intended effects (Reinelt, 2002).

4 A similar attention to the non-fixability of identity and the deployment of excess and the grotesque to move between identity/spaces of the post-colony/colonial is found in Achille Mbembe's (1992) work.

5 However, these modes of resistance are performatively open to those in power – hetero-normative humour is often used to undermine the marginalised still further – women, people of colour, homosexuals, all have to deal with racist/sexist humour as political rhetoric (Weaver, 2011). The voice of the subaltern is often ignored and overlooked, as is the violence of the state meted out to demonstrators.

6 India is a bicameral parliamentary democracy. The more powerful lower house is called the 'Lok Sabha' (People's Assembly) and has 543 members. The upper house is called 'Rajya Sabha' (States' Assembly) with 233 members. Representatives to the Lok Sabha are chosen on a first-past-the-post basis by single-member constituencies. Just over 10 per cent of MPs in the Indian parliament are women; the world average is 19.2 per cent, which puts India at 96 out of 186 in the Inter-Parliamentary Union league table for women's representation in parliaments and 122 in the 2008 UNDP Gender Inequality Index. Since 1977, India has seen the dominance of coalition politics. The 9th Schedule of the Indian Constitution provides for a quota in parliamentary elections for Dalit (low caste) and Tribal citizens. The voting turnout for Indian elections to parliament remains high at around 60 per cent. Voting is not compulsory.

7 The linguistic politics of India divides the country largely on a north/south axis. MPs from the south do not speak Hindi and are resistant to any suggestion that it is the 'national language' and accept English as a communicative bridge in politics and governance.

8 The Jan Lokpal Bill (Citizen's ombudsman Bill) is a draft anti-corruption bill drawn up by prominent civil society activists seeking the appointment of a Jan Lokpal, an independent body that would investigate corruption cases, complete the investigation within a year and take necessary action swiftly (http://indiaagainstcorruption.org/).

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