Democracy's Performance

Jon McKenzie

In the anthology *Performing Democracy*, scholars from around the world present research on urban, community-based performance (Haedicke and Nellhaus 2001). The essays explore cultural performance as a means of social production and democratic resistance. For the past few years, I have been researching how these performative practices have gone digital as well, how groups such as Critical Art Ensemble and Electronic Disturbance Theater have merged art, activism, and technology to create practices of electronic civil disobedience (see McKenzie 1999, 2001a; and McKenzie and Dominguez 2001).

This concern with democracy's performance, I believe, runs through the half-century or so of cultural performance research, from the studies of 1960s' political theatre to research on ACT-UP and the "NEA Four" in the 1980s and early 1990s, to contemporary research in community-based performance, direct-action civil disobedience, and emerging forms of electronic civil disobedience. In fact, we might think of the field of performance studies as a global test site for the study of performative forms of creativity, collaboration, and democracy. The values of this testing can be found in our commitment to experimentation and method, and to the contesting of cultural norms and the protesting of social injustice. This testing informs our research, administrative service, and teaching, not only our evaluation of the performances we study but also of each other's work and that of our students, whom we regularly put to the test. In addition, the field of performance studies has a long tradition of contesting its own institutionalization, seeking to imbue our work with experimental modes of research and teaching.

This article examines a second test site of democracy's performance, one that stresses the normative dimensions of performance. The topics of this site also include democracy, performance, and testing. The essay is divided into three parts: the first addresses a speech by President George W. Bush; the second, Nietzsche's *Gay Science*; and the third, "dissatisfied democrats."[1]

The thoughts explored here grow out of research contained in *Perform or Else* (2001b). There I focus on performance not only as resistance and transgression, but also in terms of normativity and domination. To blurb my own back cover speculations: I believe performance will have been to the 20th and 21st centuries what discipline was to the 18th and 19th, that is, an ontohistorical formation of power and knowledge. Building on the work of Butler, Lyotard, and Marcuse, I call this formation the "performance stratum." This stratum is composed, in part, by the sedimentations of different types of performances, not only cultural but also

organizational and technological. Since at least the Second World War, managers and organizational theorists have studied and designed the performances of workers and institutions, while engineers and computer scientists have created high performance military and communication technologies.

From annual performance reviews to high-performance missile systems—and yes, even to ritual and theatre—performance now gathers together a vast array of contemporary phenomena. Today, all cultures, all organizations, all technical systems can be studied in terms of different, though historically related, performance paradigms. And beyond the paradigms just mentioned are the financial performance of stock markets, the educational performance of schoolchildren, and the sexual performance of Masters and Johnson.

All these paradigms sit atop the performance stratum, which they have helped to articulate and upon which they are now becoming increasingly entwined.

This performance stratum is less about the replacement of discipline's industrial capitalism and its Enlightened, colonial project; it is more about their displacement and reinscription within the digital circuits of our postcolonial, postmodern world. Here the alphabetic archive gives way to the digital database and the factory to the living room. Lifestyles once dis*count*ed by the Establishment are now *dis*counted at establishments around the world, on sale at places like Benetton, the Gap, and Starbucks. Desire is thus becoming undisciplined: more and more, it *performs*. Performance, in short, is the power matrix of contemporary globalization, and it is for this reason I contend that we are entering an age of global performance.

George W. Bush and the Will to Power

On 20 September 2001, President George W. Bush addressed a Joint Session of Congress and a global television audience. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that on that night, the whole world was watching.

I will focus on two sets of passages in the President's speech. In the first, President Bush identified those responsible for the attacks of 9/11 and placed them in a historical and, if you like, philosophical, perspective. "The evidence," he said, "all points to a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as al Qaeda." He went on to say that, "Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber—a democratically elected government." And here is the text that really interests me:

> We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions—*by abandoning every value except the will to power*—they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism. (Bush 2001a; emphasis added)

Six weeks later, on 7 December, Bush used very similar language when commemorating the attack on Pearl Harbor: "We've seen their kind before. The terrorists are the heirs to fascism. They have the same will to power, the same disdain for the individual, the same mad global ambitions" (Bush 2001b).

I am interested here in the President's use of the term "will to power" and the performative force of his speech before Congress. My hunch is that members of al Qaeda are not big readers of Nietzsche—nor, I suspect, has President Bush spent much time with these difficult texts. If he had, he might sense that the "will to power" is not one thing, but many, and that reducing it to the visions of power-hungry individuals is the surest way to close down Nietzsche's text.

For me (and here, I am channeling Deleuze, Guattari, Foucault, and many oth-

**THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
FY 1999-2000 PERFORMANCE PLAN**
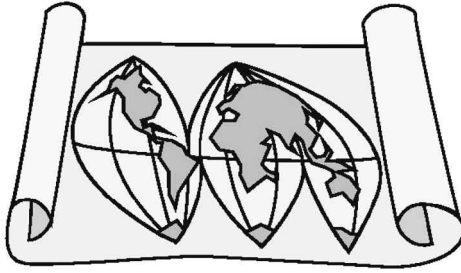
- *Increase global economic growth.*

- *Promote broad-based economic growth in developing and transitional economies.*

- *Enhance the ability of American citizens to travel and live abroad securely.*

- *Control how immigrants and non-immigrants enter and remain in the United States.*

- *Minimize the impact of international crime on the United States and its citizens.*

- *Reduce significantly from 1997 levels the entry of illegal drugs into the United States.*

- *Reduce international terrorist attacks, especially against the United States and its citizens.*

- *Increase foreign government adherence to democratic practices and respect for human rights.*

1. Selected priorities of the United States Department of State FY 1999–2000 Performance Plan. (United States Department of State 1999)

ers), the "will to power" is best understood as a matrix of forces that finds expression in all forms and processes, living and dead. It is the unending surge of difference and repetition that permeates the natural and social worlds, disturbing our attempts to divide existence in two: nature/culture, physis/techne, life/death. Because it is different from itself, the question is less "*What is* the will to power?" than "*Which one?*" Which will to power, which arrangement of forces is at work here? What form does it take? What action, what passion? Is it active or reactive? Is difference affirmed or negated? And what is the tone of this affirmation or negation?

Let us recall here that in "Signature, Event, Context" (1982) Derrida hooked up Austin and Nietzsche precisely in terms of the *force* of performative utterances. Let us also recall that Austin himself argued that performatives were not limited to spoken language (Austin [1962] 1999)—and indeed, gestures, signatures, and by extension *any manner of making a mark or making a difference* can be a performative. From this perspective, the crucial distinction to make is not between linguistic and "embodied" performances, nor between performatives and constatives, but rather between different performativities, different arrangements of illocutionary and perlocutionary forces. Such complex arrangements may be considered instantiations of the will to power. Thus I would argue that President Bush's performance

in September 2001, far from battling the will to power, was actually a particular enactment of it (as, I should add, are any critiques of it—including mine).

This brings me to the second passage in his address before Congress. At a crucial point in his speech, the President turned from his U.S. audience and addressed the world, thereby revealing his own mad global ambition. "Every nation, in every region," he said, "now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime" (Bush 2001a). We might reflect a moment on the performative force of this utterance—and the conditions for evaluating its success or failure. I will only sketch the outlines of such a reading, sticking close to Austin.

The President's "either/or" ultimatum divides the world in two: an us and a them, freedom vs. tyranny, good vs. evil, democracy vs. the will to power. It imposes a difference and also demands a decision. In a word: this is a test, a global test of democracy's performance in a new world order. With this test, President Bush effectively challenges the nations of the world to perform—or else. Either governments perform in accordance with this "war on terrorism" or they may face the power of U.S. high-performance weapon systems. We can read this decisive and divisive test as the speech act's intended illocutionary force.

President Bush's challenge also carries perlocutionary force: it produces secondary effects. Given the power of his lecture machine and its world wide web of destinations, these effects are labyrinthian, but I think we can already see them at work—in Chechnya, the Philippines, the Middle East, and elsewhere. In addition, beyond these already troubling effects, we might also ask: What effects might his performative have on solidifying the emerging performance stratum, that new world order, that Empire, that Integrated Circuit which proudly proclaims itself to be democratic—and in which the United States is variously cast as the supreme hegemon, its top executive, or its reluctant yet forceful policeman.

This brings me back to the first global test site mentioned above: the one comprised of the resistant sites found in the *Performing Democracy* anthology, in activist theatre and hacktivist websites, and, more generally, in performance studies research. What is the relation between these two sites of democracy's performance: those resistant sites we study so closely, and those dominant sites of the new world order?

I am not sure we can easily assume that one test site is all about localization and the other globalization; that one's all about cultural performance, the other about techno-organizational performance. After all, the practices of electronic civil disobedience, for instance, combine experimental art, social organization, and technical know-how. Further, these artists, activists, and programmers collaborate in performances that are globally produced yet locally situated: in Chiapas, in Seattle, in Frankfurt. Alternatively, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue in *Empire* (2000), the organizational and technological networks of contemporary power are increasingly governed by forms of immaterial labor and biopolitical control that valorize difference, ephemerality, and site specificity, the very terrain performance studies has staked out.

Perhaps then there is only one test site, a global site on which multiple experiments in democracy are now playing out. Since 1989, scores of new democratic states have emerged: some flourish, others wither and slip away. Elsewhere, long-established democracies have begun ceding key functions to various trans- or supra-national bodies, leaving political theorists to ponder extra-national democratic processes and the end of the nation-state. Meanwhile, people everywhere are performing democracy in their daily lives and struggles. And lest anyone forget, George W. Bush is acting in the name of a free and democratic world, with massive public support in the U.S.

All this constitutes the test site of democracy's performance.

Performance, Democracy, and The Gay Science

According to Nietzsche, there is an intimate relation between performance and democracy, one he discusses in Book Five of *The Gay Science* ([1882] 1974), in a forecasting section titled "How Things Will Become Ever More 'Artistic' in Europe." Though elsewhere Nietzsche often and enthusiastically affirms the artist, the creator, the player of masks, the quotation marks here around "artistic" tip us off: something's up, Nietzsche's taking a different tack. The writer of *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Dithyrambs of Dionysus* now takes aim at actors, at role-playing, and yes, even and especially at performance, "good performance," *guten Spiel*. Significantly, the performance Nietzsche targets mixes the theatrical and the occupational, and in doing so, uses and abuses its performers. He writes:

> Even today, in our time of transition when so many factors cease to compel men, the care to make a living still compels almost all male Europeans to adopt a particular *role*, their so-called occupation. A few retain the freedom, a merely apparent freedom, to choose this role for themselves: for most men it is chosen. The result is rather strange. As they attain a more advanced age, almost all Europeans confound themselves with their role; they become the victims of their own "good performance." ([1882] 1974:302)

For me, what Nietzsche picked up in guten Spiel was the emergence of the performance stratum. (I should also point out that three major theorists of normative performance—Butler, Lyotard, and Marcuse—were all readers of Nietzsche.) According to Nietzsche, in the future of "good performance," humans fall victim to their own roles, their own acts. Significantly, he connects this performance to democracy and America. Though he initially ascribes this "good performance" to European males, he proceeds to place it in a much wider perspective, connecting it to a certain "cocky faith" found in democratic ages. These are, respectively:

> the Athenian faith that first becomes noticeable in the Periclean age, the faith of the Americans today that is more and more becoming the European faith as well: The individual becomes convinced that he can do just about anything and *can manage almost any role*, and everybody experiments with himself, improvises, makes new experiments, enjoys his experiments; and all nature ceases and becomes art. (302–03)

It is a commonplace to say that Nietzsche is no friend of democracy, of the people, but I would say, more specifically, that Nietzsche is no friend of a democracy monopolized by the modern nation-state, no friend of a notion of "the people" that reduces their energies and power to merely supporting established orders or toiling away in roles that deaden and close off the future. This is precisely what he senses in the all-too-American "good performance." Paradoxically, in the experiments of becoming-actor, Nietzsche senses *an inability to create*, an incapacity to build as an architect does, to plan, to organize, to construct a future that spans millennia:

> [W]hat is dying out is the fundamental faith that would enable us to calculate, to promise, to anticipate the future in plans of such scope, and to sacrifice the future to them—namely, the faith that man has a value and meaning only insofar as he is a *stone in a great edifice*; and to that end he must be *solid* first of all, a "stone"—and above all not an actor! (303)

Again, these passages run counter to many others, where Nietzsche not only affirms the artist, the actor, the player of masks but indeed finds models of affirmation in them.

Indeed, this play we find in Nietzsche, between the theatrical and antitheatrical, may very well mark the rupture of performance into modern thought, the emergence of performance as a problem, a site of contestation.

In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche is not out to dismiss art and embrace science. Instead, he pits artist against artist and scientist against scientist. To be precise: he sets architect against actor, gay scientist against the all-too-serious scientists. Through these contests, he seeks to invent another science, another art, a gay science that challenges us not only to question but to overcome the long-standing division, the "either/or" between art and science.

Today let us ask: What might a contemporary gay science look like, one that would help us think about the test site of democracy's performance? It is here that the work of Avital Ronell is so important. In "The Test Drive," her provocative reading of *The Gay Science*, Ronell raises the following questions:

> What is a science that predicates itself on gaiety without losing its quality of being a science? And how does Nietzsche open the channels of a scientificity that, without compromising the rigor of inquiry, would allow for the inventiveness of science fiction, experimental art and, above all, a highly stylized existence? (1995:201)

These questions are not only epistemological but also onto-historical: they bear on our being and time. For Ronell, the importance of *The Gay Science* today lies in the event it signals from afar, an event closely tied to technology and the demands of testing. She writes: "Gay Sci signals to us today the extent to which our rapport to the world has undergone considerable mutation by means of our adherence to the imperatives of testing" (201). For Ronell, *The Gay Science* signals an engagement with a new *experimental disposition*, one which Nietzsche kickstarted a century ago and which she reboots for us today as *the test drive*.

Now herein lies the trickiest challenge of all—at least for someone trained in the arts, humanities, or any of the various schools of cultural criticism—and that is to read the incessant testing found in science and technology not only as an object of critique, not only as an activity to question and negate, but also as a performance *that can and must be affirmed*. For me, this is the most daunting test of contemporary gay science:

> Testing, which our Daseins encounter every day in the form of SAT, GRE, HIV, MCATS, FDA, cosmetics, engines, stress, and arms testing, 1-2-3-broadcast systems, and testing your love, testing your friendship, in a word, testing the brakes—was located by Nietzsche mainly in the eternal joy of becoming. (206)

You may be wondering: Is this some kind of joke? *Affirm* the test drive? But think about it: To oppose art and science, technique and technology, creativity and analytics, isn't this among the most comfortable of positions, the most major of presuppositions? To make matters trickier: Doesn't critique, even critique of critique, entail putting something to the test, not just once and for all, but again and again? And even trickier still: Aren't the most active of artists and activists precisely those who experiment with their materials, their coalitions, their lives—who put them all to a certain test?

In the age of global performance, all the world becomes a test site. Thus the challenge facing us today: To negate *and* affirm this worldwide test pattern.

Performance Monitoring and Evaluation
TIPS

USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation

PREPARING A PERFORMANCE MONITORING PLAN

USAID's reengineering guidance requires operating units to prepare a Performance Monitoring Plan for the systematic and timely collection of performance data.

This Tips offers advice for preparing such a plan.

What Is a Performance Monitoring Plan?

A performance monitoring plan (PMP) is a tool USAID operating units use to plan and manage the collection of performance data. Sometimes the plan also includes plans for data analysis, reporting, and use.

Reengineering guidance requires operating units to prepare PMPs once their strategic plans are approved. At a minimum, PMPs should include:

- a detailed definition of each performance indicator
- the source, method, frequency and schedule of data collection, and
- the office, team, or individual responsible for ensuring data are available on schedule

As part of the PMP process, it is also advisable (but not mandated) for operating units to plan for:

- how the performance data will be analyzed, and
- how it will be reported, reviewed, and used to inform decisions

While PMPs are required, they are for the operating unit's own use. Review by central or regional bureaus is not mandated, although some bureaus encourage sharing PMPs. PMPs should be updated as needed to ensure plans, schedules, and assignments remain current.

Why Are PMPs Important?

A performance monitoring plan is a critical tool for planning, managing, and documenting data collection. It contributes to the effectiveness of the performance monitoring system by assuring that *comparable* data will be collected on a *regular and timely* basis. These are essential to the operation of a credible and useful performance-based management approach.

PMPs promote the collection of *comparable* data by sufficiently documenting indicator definitions, sources, and methods of data collection. This enables operating units to collect comparable data over time even when key personnel change.

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2. Tips recommended by the U.S. Agency for International Development for monitoring the performance of foreign countries. (USAID 1996:1)

Dissatisfied Democrats

In his 1966 "Political Preface" to the second edition of *Eros and Civilization*, Herbert Marcuse writes that he had once held the hope that, beyond the sublimation of Eros in technological rationality, beyond this reality principle which he named "the performance principle," Marcuse had hoped that civilization would learn to practice "the gay science," that is, "how to use the social wealth for shaping man's world in accordance with his Life Instincts, in the concerted struggle against the purveyors of Death" (1995:xi). In short, "how to live in joy without fear" (xiv).

Such hopes, Marcuse later admits, were overly optimistic, for he had totally underestimated the power of what he called the "democratic introjection" with its "political paraphernalia" which "permits people (up to a point) to choose their own leaders and to participate (up to a point) in the government which governs them—[while] it also allows the masters to disappear behind the technological veil of the productive and destructive apparatus which they control" (xii).

Marcuse wrote this in 1966. Today, once again: What are the chances of the gay science on the test site of democracy's performance? Rather than beyond performativity, might there be a gay science *within* the performance stratum, struggling to free itself from its shell?

I would like to suggest that, given its rich, theoretical complexity and its incredibly diverse range of techniques, performance today offers a privileged site for practicing the gay science, for rehearsing it, inventing it, letting it in and giving it a chance. At the same time, the gay science may offer us a certain fictive or sci-fi method for operating across various paradigms of performance research: cultural, organizational, technological, and beyond. This gay sci-fi might allow us to study different forms of performance in terms of their surrounding atmosphere of affects, their arrangement of forces, their will to power. The challenge lies in not only studying different bodies of performative evaluation, but also revaluating them to create new bodies, new performances, and perhaps new democratic forms.

In this final section, I present some research I am just beginning to undertake. It concerns yet another performance paradigm, one that offers a very different perspective on democracy's performance. I am still not sure what to call this paradigm: provisionally, I refer to it as "government performance." One way to approach government performance is through organizational performance. In 1993, Congress passed the Government Performance and Results Act which established the National Performance Review, a government-wide program to improve the efficiency of federal departments and programs. As Al Gore put it, the goal was a government that "works better and costs less" (1993).

Now this was not a one-time performance review, but an ongoing annual assessment of whether departments were performing in an efficient and effective manner. Performance assessment was only the beginning, however. The whole point was to *improve* performance, so the annual reviews offered recommendations, and from them a performance plan was created containing specific performance goals. The following year, the next performance review would assess how well those goals were met—and the process would begin again.

This went on throughout the eight-year Clinton administration. We see here an explicit effort to improve government performance using techniques drawn from business and management: the performance cycle is measure, assess, optimize, and implement—over and over and over. Thus runs the test drive of the National Performance Review. One of its products is the 1999/2000 report. Some of the "strategic goals," a sort of "to do" list for the State Department, are laid out in this "Performance Plan" (plates 1 & 2). In terms of democracy's performance,

the last bullet point is crucial: *Increase foreign government adherence to democratic practices and respect for human rights*. Though the National Performance Review can be understood in terms of organizational performance, the State Department's performance plan spills over into something else: the paradigm of government performance.

To get a better angle on the paradigm, I have included a document from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID; plate 3). USAID provides financial aid to foreign governments. I have suggested that performance and its tests are expanding and gathering momentum. In this document we see how this test pattern has gone globally governmental.

The manual provides tips for creating a "performance monitoring plan." The crucial point here is that the performance to be monitored is *not* that of USAID, but rather of their "clients" or "customers." In short, this manual instructs agency workers on how to monitor *other* governments' performances. Government performance here involves not only taking one's own measure, but taking the measure of the world: testing democracy everywhere to see how well it is performing.

One way to read this manual is to study how the criteria behind the National Performance Review have been externalized and projected around the world, thus understanding government performance as a sort of "International Performance Review." This reading, while of interest, is also misleading, for USAID only scratches the surface of the field that I am calling "government performance." Many other entities monitor this performance besides the U.S. government. Indeed, this same manual lists such data sources as international organizations, private firms, and nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs. All these bodies generate and exchange studies of democracy's performance.

Again, this research is preliminary; however, it already indicates that concepts of government performance date back at least to the 1970s. Some of the most important academic fields contributing to this research today are political science, international relations, public policy, and sociology. Significantly, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, there has been an explosion of research into the performance of newly formed democracies, not only in Eastern and Central Europe, but around the world. In this field, the criteria for evaluating democracy's performance are numerous and complex. Some of the most important are the existence of a multiparty system, free and regular elections, human rights protections, fair labor practices, health care services, criminal justice system, environmental protections, as well as overall popular satisfaction with government performance.

In *Perform or Else*, I argue that, in addition to the knowledge forms that compose the performance stratum, the age of global performance also entails a complex atmosphere of forces and affects. It turns out that this atmosphere is regularly tested by a system of barometers, including the Eurobarometer, Latinobarómetro, Afrobarometer, and several planned Asian Barometers (The Afrobarometer Network 2002; Huneeus 1995). These barometers are not meteorological but demographic: they are public opinion surveys undertaken to assess democracy's performance in individual countries and regions of the world. Some of these barometers have been used for more than a decade, as has another often cited instrument, the World Values Survey (Inglehart, Basanez, and Moreno 1998).

In this demographic research, researchers make special efforts to pose and translate questions as consistently as possible in order to allow comparison of results across different countries. Responses from particular questions can also be cross-tabulated with others, allowing even more complex relationships to emerge. Of particular interest here is a graph taken from a paper by Hans-Dieter Klingemann (1998), a researcher at The Berlin Institute for Social Science. The graph is based on a World Values Survey taken during the mid-1990s (plate 4). Klingemann focuses on 39 democracies, some well established, others recently formed. The left

Figure 3:   Support of Democracy as a Form of Government by Positive Evaluation of Performance of Democracy
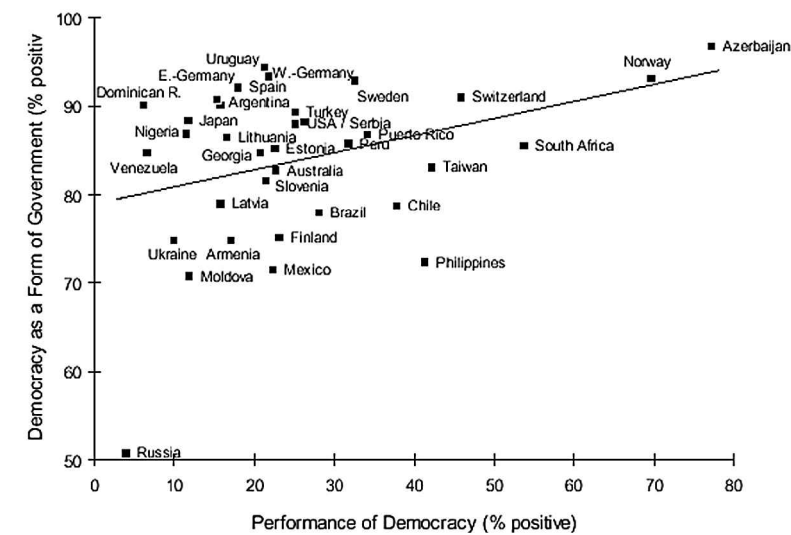
3. The results of a "World Values Survey" conducted by the Berlin Institute for Social Science. (Klingemann 1998)

axis charts the respondents' support of democracy as a desirable form of government, while the right depicts the same respondents' satisfaction with the performance of their particular democratic regime. For instance, respondents in Azerbaijan had high support for democracy and high satisfaction with the effectiveness of their government's performance, while Russia, by contrast, had low levels of both support and satisfaction.

I am interested here, however, in the cluster of countries in the upper left-hand quadrant, countries with relatively high levels of support for democracy but low satisfaction with their particular democracy's performance. The United States is among this group, as are several other long-standing democracies. Klingemann cites this clustering as evidence of what he calls "dissatisfied democrats": people who strongly believe in democracy and yet are unhappy with its particular embodiment.

We might think about the implications of this notion of "dissatisfied democrats." Might it indicate that the "democratic introjection" is wearing off, that people are ready to rise up against their governments? Or might it suggest that democracy itself is threatened? That it has become what is known as "a permanently failing organization" (Meyer, Zucker, and Zucker 1989)? Or, again, might all these dissatisfied democrats lend support to Derrida's claim that democracy is an inherently unfinished or incomplete project, one that is thus always "to come," always being invented, always being tested and contested ([1989] 2002)?

One thing we know for sure: with government performance, we are witnessing the emergence of a global yet fragmented network for testing and monitoring democracy's performance. More directly than performance studies, performance management, or techno-performance, government performance channels sovereignty machines and juridical orders. Right now, this network contains national governments, trans- and supranational entities, nation-states, NGOs, academic researchers, and most importantly, dissatisfied democrats: that is, disaffected people. To what uses this network will be put, and by whom or what: that is the question.

While this research on government performance focuses on national democ-

racies, there is much evidence—and desire—that something else may be emerging. If the ancient Greeks invented democracy in the form of the city-state, and colonial North Americans reinvented it in the nation-state, what democratic forms might the world create in the age of global performance? Some supra- or transnational democratic state? Or perhaps a loose network of porous, micro-democracies? Or something else altogether? And finally: What performances have a chance of building this unheard-of democracy, and what role will the gay science play in *its* performance?

Note

1. A version of this text was originally delivered on 12 April 2002, as a keynote speech at the PSi 8 conference, held at New York University. The section "Performance, Democracy, and the Gay Science" is largely taken from *Perform or Else* (McKenzie 2001).

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