

High Performance Schooling

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A faculty member at Columbia University spoke of a friend who was planning to begin graduate studies after having been out of school several years. The professor asked whether she was anxious about the Graduate Record Examination, a standardized test required for admission to graduate school. 'Well,' was the response, 'I'm an American. I was born to be tested.'
F. Allan Hanson, *Testing Testing*¹

As anthropologist Marilyn Strathern notes in her introduction to the collection *Audit Cultures*, the emergence of audit and assessment procedures that we see in academic practice 'is part of a global phenomenon. Audit regimes accompany a specific epoch in Western international affairs'.² The different evaluative procedures found in the US GRE (Graduate Record Examination) and the UK RAE (Research Assessment Exercise) are both culturally specific – and increasingly shared by people around the world. From individuals and small groups to larger institutions, governments and, of late, international and transnational organizations, we find a complex and growing regime of evaluative procedures that accompany, enable and, precisely, *account* for contemporary processes of globalization. Such procedures are in no way limited to academics, of course, but extend across every social sphere, including those of business, politics, healthcare, the military and even art and culture. Through initiatives such as the United Nation's Global Compact, the entire world is becoming a giant test site, a colossal 'audit-orium' or space of auditing. Perhaps a more fitting punch line to my epigraph will soon be: 'I'm an Earthling. I was born to be audited'.

It is tempting – and worthwhile – to understand the emergence of formal assessment procedures within the university as a recent and unprecedented intrusion of financial and managerial practices into the academy. Yet while it is important to distinguish, for instance, the academic examination and the financial audit, it may be equally important to analyze, assess, examine and, well, audit their commonalities. At the most general level, the exam and the audit are modern forms of evaluation, applicable to individuals and institutions alike. Similarly, while it is crucial to theorize the 'newness' of audit cultures around the globe (a task I shall attempt below), it is likewise important to recognize certain continuities with the past. As Max Weber suggested a century ago, the modern university is that bureaucracy which prepares people to work

in other bureaucracies. Accountants and auditors, for example, do not learn their trade solely in the workplace; they are first educated and trained in the academy, as are contemporary management consultants and ‘performance gurus’. Weber himself stressed the importance of examinations for entrance into a wide variety of capitalist institutions; in addition, he noted that the ‘bureaucratization of capitalism, with its demand for expertly trained technicians, clerks, et cetera, carries such examinations all over the world’.³

Global audit cultures, then, are both new and old, both highly ‘financialized’ and highly ‘academicized’. Nonetheless, despite certain commonalities and continuities, the phenomenon of ‘audit cultures’ within contemporary educational institutions is both different from and discontinuous with previous forms of academic normalization. Contemporary audit and assessment procedures can be understood within the context of ‘new managerialism’, a much wider regime of organizational practices that must itself be seen as a crucial part of global neoliberal capitalism. And, as cited above, Strathern contends that audit regimes accompany a particular epoch in Western international affairs, adding that an ‘anthropologist’s question might be just how one recognizes epochal change’.⁴

My own purpose here is to offer a way of recognizing this epochal change, theorizing different dimensions of audit culture in terms of performance, or more specifically, in terms of a general theory of performance.⁵ Performance provides not so much a unified perspective from which to theorize audit culture but instead a complex yet highly specific set of contrasting perspectives, among the most relevant here being ‘financial performance’, ‘performance measurement’, ‘performance studies’, ‘performance management’ and ‘performativity’.

To begin with, one performance perspective that helps us to think through the question of audit culture is the increasingly global use of the term ‘financial performance’, used to analyze everything from stocks and bonds to corporations to entire markets and even global economies. Indeed, officials of the International Monetary Fund regularly assess ‘global economic performance’.

From the perspective of critical cultural theory, financial performance functions as a highly normative paradigm of social discourse and provides us with critical tools for understanding the repressive regimes of audit cultures. But this is not the only use of the term performance that concerns us here. A very different perspective – some might say an *opposite* usage – comes from performance studies, a research paradigm that focuses on cultural performances ranging from theatre and ritual to performance art and expressive behaviours of everyday life. Performance studies scholars based in the US, UK, and increasingly around the world, tend to stress the resistant or transgressive potential of cultural performance and thus provide us with an oppositional perspective on audit culture. To think effectively about the cultural dimension of ‘audit culture’ might well be to use the terms put forward by the field of performance studies.

However salient both the normative performances of finance and the transgressive performances of culture may be for understanding audit cultures, I will argue that

audit procedures found in the university are largely synonymous with contemporary 'performance measurement' techniques developed over the course of the 20th century in a wide range of organizations, from corporations to governments. There is widespread evidence that a major paradigm shift occurred within organizational theory and practice around the Second World War, producing what many practitioners and researchers now call 'performance management', a paradigm much more attuned to service and information work than the industrial labour studied by Taylor and thus more readily applicable to educational contexts. Simply put, performance management describes the new managerialism.

'Financial performance', 'performance studies' and 'performance management' are not simply different variations or meanings of the term 'performance'; rather, each entails specific sets of discourses and practices used by very different people – accountants and financial analysts, artists and cultural theorists, and managers and organizational theorists – working in very different contexts. Each has emerged in the United States since WWII and each has gone – or is currently going – global. Nonetheless, these different performance paradigms are now overlapping, intersecting and, more profoundly, constituting the epochal change suggested by Strathern. In this essay, I aim to give a general account of performativity and its relation to the academy. Though many of my examples come from the US, such an account has relevance to the British academy and many others, as well as to the broader topic of 'auditing culture', which I take to be a global, and indeed, globalizing phenomenon, one in which performativity plays a crucial and even leading role. Indeed, I contend that 'performance' is an emerging formation of power and knowledge, one that builds upon yet displaces the disciplinary formation described by Foucault. Or to put this another way: audit cultures arise in an age of global performativity.

Education and performativity

The relevance of performativity for understanding the emergence of audit cultures within the academy can be seen in Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, first published in French in 1979 and translated into English in 1984. Let us recall Lyotard's central argument: modern philosophers and educators legitimated both knowledge and power through such 'grand narratives' as Enlightenment, Progress and Liberation. In contrast to modernity's grand, unified narratives, Lyotard argues that the postmodern entails diffuse language games. Specifically, he suggests that contemporary decision-makers 'attempt to manage these clouds of sociality according to input/output matrices, following a logic which implies that their matrices are commensurable and that the whole is determinable. They allocate our lives for the growth of power. In matters of social justice and of scientific truth alike, the legitimation of that power is based on its *optimizing the system's performance-efficiency*'.⁶ Performativity, for Lyotard, is precisely system optimization, the incessant calculation or 'minimaxing' of input/output ratios (i.e. minimizing inputs and maximizing outputs), calculations greatly facilitated by computer and other information technologies. In some sense, performativity is the postmodern condition, and perhaps it follows that postmodern culture is an auditing culture.

While Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition* has long been one of the most influential articulations of postmodernism, his theorization of performativity's specific operation within the university was long overshadowed by the attention given to his more general considerations of the death of modernism's grand narratives. The global emergence of audit cultures, however, has brought renewed attention to Lyotard's discussion of education. Peter Roberts writes that an 'appraisal of the New Zealand policy scene suggests Lyotard was stunningly accurate in his predictions about many features of the changing higher education landscape'.⁷ In particular, Roberts, writing in 1998, notes that 'there is much in the history of educational reform in New Zealand over the past 13 years that bears an uncanny resemblance to the scenario described so vividly by Lyotard nearly two decades ago. Several phases in the commodification of knowledge can be identified: the development of standardized units for trading qualifications (and parts of qualifications); the concentration on skills and information in curriculum policy; and, most importantly, the redefinition of the concept of "education" itself. Universities, along with all other tertiary institutions, are now expected to measure up to the new imperatives of performativity, and ongoing state support for programmes at odds with this logic cannot be guaranteed'.⁸ That logic, again, is one of system optimization: optimizing both the operation of the educational system and, as importantly, its function within the broader economic system.

If Lyotard's theory of performativity appears prophetic with respect to the contemporary 'audit-ori-ums' of higher education, the ambiguities of performativity which Lyotard noted in passing have become more visible, numerous and troubling. Robin Usher and Nicky Solomon, two Australian education researchers, write that 'performativity contributes simultaneously to both the strengthening and loosening of boundaries, to both an economy of the same and to an economy of difference. This emphasis on performativity has contributed to a trend where researchers are held accountable for what they do through various forms of research assessment. Universities become more consumer oriented, dominated by a managerial discourse and a logic of accountability and excellence'.⁹ Usher and Solomon argue that while the increased assessment of research may encourage the creation of elite researchers who work at elite universities, it may also be 'accompanied by a greater number of researchers and universities who previously didn't engage in scholarship and research in its traditional sense'.¹⁰ Similarly, with respect to the types of research projects undertaken, they argue that performativity may in some instances restrict the range of research but in others increase the diversity of objects, methods and approaches.

Perhaps even more troubling than the diversity and ambiguity noted by Usher and Solomon is the possibility that even the most repressive versions of performativity actually *embrace* diversity, and that both the economies of sameness and those of difference increasingly serve the logic of capital. While Henry Ford once stated that people could buy a car in any colour they liked, '*as long as it is black*', today Toyota, BMW and General Motors not only manufacture cars in a wide array of colours, they also produce customized versions for more specialized tastes. And this embrace of difference is crucial, I would argue, to an understanding of audit cultures and global performativity.

Financial performance

Is it any coincidence that audit culture has emerged as a social phenomenon – or at least a critical concept – over the past decade or so, a decade that made the high rolling 80s look like a community centre BINGO game; a decade marked by the spread of new and highly popular, yet barely understood derivatives with such names as straddles, look back options and basket options; by what David Harvey has called the flexible accumulation of capital, the rapid and massive flows of financial investment into – and out of – far-flung international markets; by such troubling financial disasters as those surrounding Barings Bank, Long-Term Capital Management and the government of Orange County, California; by eye-popping returns on stocks, especially IPOs (initial public offerings) traded on an upstart market called NASDAQ; by speculative bubbles and spectacular busts in real estate, computers and telecommunications, the latter two not only providing exciting objects of speculation but also facilitating unprecedented means for doing so, such as online trading, day-trading and after-hours trading; and, finally, by scandals that rocked cutting-edge corporations, established investment banks and trusted accounting and auditing firms? From another perspective: to what extent could audit cultures *not* have emerged during such a financially driven time period?

We are witnessing the emergence of ‘high performance finance’, and its stakes are very high indeed. To take but one indication: the *Wall Street Journal*’s July 1, 2002 quarterly review section contained numerous charts ranking ‘Best Performers’ and ‘Worst Performers’. The performers here were not high profile managers, much less famous actors or star athletes. In fact, the performers were not even human. Instead, the best and worst performers were financial instruments, market indexes and industrial sectors: the charts represented the second quarter performance of US-traded large-cap issues, US stock sectors, global stocks, global stock indexes and global industry groups.

The term ‘performance’ has become central to investors, stock brokers, financial analysts, government regulators and professional accountants and auditors. Whatever else stocks, bonds, mutual funds, markets, industries and economies do, today they all *perform*. For a term so central and ubiquitous to the financial world, it is striking that the definition of the term ‘performance’ remains elusive, not just for the casual investor or outside observer, but even and especially for financial professionals. This elusiveness became most evident during the 2002 scandals of leading corporations, investment companies and accounting and auditing firms. As early as February 26th of that year, the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) convened a special task force on financial performance reporting by business enterprises. Its first discussion question: ‘Is a definition of *financial performance* necessary or even desirable? More specifically, can financial performance be reduced to a single financial measure or a single financial statement?’

While the layperson might define financial performance simply as profitability or income, defining such profitability or income *accurately* and *consistently* is very problematic, as is representing financial performance in a formal statement. At issue are the criteria or measures that compose such performance. The FASB task force states that ‘an assessment of a company’s past performance and its prospects generally

rely on benchmarks and comparisons to industry peers, which require, in part, external sources of information. Financial statements (and notes) certainly can provide measures of *operating* or *core* income, net income, comprehensive income, cash flows, total assets, revenue growth, debt to equity, return on equity and other financial measures that are useful in assessing performance. However, seeking to define financial performance might prove to be both unnecessary and a poor use of the Board's limited resources'.¹¹ While the task force acknowledges the possibility that a single statement might adequately report financial performance and implicitly suggests that 'net income' or 'operating income' is the critical criterion for determining financial performance, it explicitly refrains from defining the term.

The very difficulty of defining the concept 'performance' can, I believe, help us to see why it is important to investigate performance when we are theorizing audit culture. In its most technical sense, auditing is a fairly specific, recognizable task, one that is carried out by trained professionals. It is a term that can be used metaphorically, of course, and theorists of audit culture are interested in its roots, uses and displacements. But used in its financial sense, auditing is a term with a relatively clear definition. Performance, by contrast, multiplies and morphs, eludes definition in financial circles, and indeed, in other contexts. It appears in financial discourses, but it crops up across disciplines and fields of knowledge, meaning something different each time. And it appears on scales that are both larger and smaller than the audit. Auditors often measure 'performance', but then they are themselves measured as performers. Indeed, I would argue that performance is the term that swallows up both 'audit' and 'culture'. Unlike this pair of terms, yoked together as a new formulation, 'performance' is already widely deployed, being used to bring together both economics and culture. It allows us to think through the links between the normative evaluation of economic tasks and the production of a whole range of social activities and values precisely because the term 'performance' emerges in both economic and cultural environments, as if it belonged equally to both, and thus shows us how these worlds blur, overlap and connect. Thus although the concept of financial performance clearly connects us to the 'audit' of audit cultures, 'performance' describes an even more general regime of assessment and evaluation, one that absorbs 'audit' and 'culture' in ways that throws light on both.

Performance studies

This brings me to a second and very different sense of 'performance' that I wish to stress, one that comes out of the cultural sphere. The field of performance studies is a research paradigm that focuses on cultural performances, including theatre, ritual, performance art and practices of everyday life. Here performativity has traditionally meant a certain theatricality, expressivity or mimicry, though understood less as a form of entertainment and more as carrying some critical force or social efficacy, in particular that of opposition to dominant societal norms. This oppositional sense of performativity dates back to the 1960s, when artists, activists and scholars in the US and elsewhere sought to radicalize different forms of cultural performance within the context of the civil rights and anti-war movements. As Susan Stanford Friedman suggests, such radicalization continued in the following decades within the contexts of feminism, gay and lesbian activism, and post-colonial and critical race studies.¹²

This second, cultural, transgressive sense of performativity differs significantly from the financial performance discussed above, which is highly normative with respect to dominant societal standards. But it is worth noting here that performance studies shares at least two characteristics with financial performance. First, despite its emphasis on transgression, performance studies has itself become institutionalized as a recognizable discipline, complete with departments, publications, prizes and credentials; but, like financial performance, it is a discipline with boundaries which its scholars and practitioners find difficult to describe and delimit. Like its financial counterpart, the object of performance studies is itself elusive. Second, performance studies scholars, in prizing resistance and transgression, nonetheless *evaluate* cultural performances, often assessing them in terms of their social efficacy. They not only recognize the ways that cultural performances can transform social life; they assess how well and to what extent they do so. In short, like financial performance, performance studies is itself a plural field of objects to be evaluated, and, like Toyota or GM, embraces diversity while enforcing and enacting certain institutionalized norms.

Performance measurement and performance management

Let us shift to a third site where the term ‘performance’ is used, debated and contested. In ‘The Performance Measurement Manifesto’, management consultant and former Harvard Business School professor Robert G. Eccles writes that the ‘leading indicators of business performance cannot be found in financial data alone. Quality, customer satisfaction, innovation, market share – metrics like these often reflect a company’s economic condition and growth potential better than reported earnings do’.¹³ In their 1984 *Performance Appraisal*, Evelyn Eichel and Henry E. Bender write that during ‘the 1960s, the purpose of performance appraisal broadened to include development of the individual, organizational planning, and improving the quality of work life. Management now used performance appraisal to try to increase employee’s productivity, effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction. Performance appraisal provided a basis for development of employee job skill, career planning, and motivation through effective coaching and information exchange between appraiser and appraisee’.¹⁴

Performance audits, performance reviews, performance appraisals, performance measurements – such evaluative procedures operate today within a large and powerful nexus of organizational discourses and practices called ‘performance management’. Performance management can be best understood as a paradigm shift within organizational management, one that began in the mid-20th century in reaction to Frederick Taylor, who set out to rationalize manufacturing processes and improve individual workers’ productivity through time and motion studies. Under scientific management, control of work shifted away from traditional foremen, who Taylor argued selected their workers based on loyalty rather than talent and who organized work according to informal rules of thumb rather than scientific methods. Over such foremen, Taylorism installed a new class of managers and specialists. Trained in the principles of scientific management, these mid-level managers and ‘efficiency experts’

sought to control factory workers with rationality, scientific method and strict conformity to the ‘one best method’. Henry Ford’s automobile factories stand as scientific management’s emblematic achievement, and Taylor’s *Principles of Scientific Management* helped to create a nation-wide ‘efficiency craze’ in the US. Taylor’s techniques spread around the world, with even the Soviet Union making use of its principles.

By mid-century, however, a new management paradigm had begun to rival Taylorism, one that has become dominant today as highly developed economies have shifted from manufacturing to service and information industries. Rather than control workers, contemporary proponents of this new performance management paradigm stress the need to ‘empower’ them by developing their collaborative abilities, decision-making skills and creative talents for problem-solving and innovation. And performance management also addresses an extraordinarily wide definition of organization performance, from day-to-day operations, human resources and information technologies to strategic planning, executive leadership and decision-making, and underlying culture.

The rise of performance management not only entails changes in the function of performance measurement, but also in the scope of its application. Especially with the rise of such management schools as systems theory and information-processing and decision-making, performance measurement techniques began to be applied beyond individuals to work teams, departments and entire organizations. Information-processing and decision-making brought management fully into the performance measurement process, as managers themselves became subject to the very evaluative processes they once applied to labourers, while systems theory explicitly encompassed the entire organization, including non-human factors such as technologies and work environments. To give some sense of how expansive performance measurement has become: through the Clinton years, Vice-President Al Gore headed the National Performance Review, an annual assessment of US government departments and agencies. Significantly, such evaluative techniques were not only internalized by federal agencies. During the 1990s, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) developed formal ‘Performance Monitoring Plans’ to collect performance data on foreign countries applying for aid from the US government.

If performance management is widespread, difficult to pin down, and dedicated to the establishment of evaluative standards, one final aspect of this performance paradigm deserves special attention: its aesthetic or artistic dimension. In explicit contrast to scientific management, contemporary performance management often draws on models from the arts, valorizing intuition and creativity as much as rationality and analysis. The performing arts, and theatre in particular, have offered consultants and organizational theorists not only metaphors but fully developed conceptual models for theorizing alternative approaches to organizational management. Examples include Peter Vaill’s *Managing as a Performing Art: New Ideas for a World of Chaotic Change*, Iain Mangham and Michael Overington’s *Organizations as Theatre: A Social Psychology of Dramatic Appearances*, and Joseph Pine and James Gilmore’s *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*.

Thus if performance management seems to echo the highly normative, economic imperatives of financial performance, it also incorporates the potentially emancipatory, exciting activity of cultural production. Like the first two, it unites both normativity and diversity, both evaluative procedures and the possibility of surprises. But more explicitly than either financial performance or performance studies, performance management seeks, quite deliberately, to fuse the activities of financial auditing and cultural performance. That is, it brings 'audit' and 'culture' into a single organizational model, and one that has significant global reach.

Global performativity

On the most general level, I would argue that performativity functions in the contemporary world much as Foucault argued that discipline functioned in the 18th and 19th centuries: as a specific onto-historical formation of power and knowledge, one that began to crystallize after the Second World War and is now becoming fully operational.¹⁵ Whereas Foucault theorized the importance of disciplinary mechanisms for the production of the modern human subject and the functioning of such institutions as the hospital, prison and university, I contend that the emerging performance stratum entails, among other things, the displacement of human subjectivity and the blurring of institutional boundaries created under the reign of discipline. Indeed, to take examples from the paradigms of performance I have described above: financial models have intruded into the arts and the university, while paradigms of cultural performance have transformed management strategies. In every kind of contemporary 'performance' we may find evidence of such blurring: from orchestras to stock markets, from primary and secondary schools to healthcare, law enforcement and even the military.

While the disciplinary subject formation described by Foucault took place within relatively stable and self-contained institutional contexts, with subjects moving linearly from one to the next by crossing clearly demarcated thresholds (from school to army to factory to prison), performative subject formation occurs within mobile and overlapping evaluative grids. It can – and should – be noted that such institutional blurring is not really so new; Foucault's 'panopticonism', after all, refers to the displacement of Bentham's prison surveillance techniques to other institutions. What's unprecedented, however, is that today the displacement and blurring of institutional borders are themselves becoming codified if not 'institutionalized', and this development entails profound changes in processes of normalization. Disciplinary archives were comprised almost exclusively of analogue materials (records being primarily handwritten, typed, mimeographic or photographic) and were housed in discrete, stand-alone storage units such as file cabinets. By contrast, performative archives are increasingly digital and networked. Digitalization and networking allow virtually all media to be recorded and translated into the same binary code and the resulting records to be copied, transmitted, stored and accessed by different institutions. Further, data-mining and information-processing techniques give decision-makers potentially unlimited ways to research, cross-reference and analyze individuals' records or 'data bodies'. In part, due to this radical transformation in archiving, it is as if institutional borders are being breached from the inside out as well

as from the outside in, with our data bodies now awaiting the arrival of our physical bodies. Specific institutions are still recognizable, of course, but both their archives and architectures bear traces of other institutions, and this hybridity produces subtle changes in one's expectations, behaviours and experiences. The Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center down the road from me, for instance, has the look, feel and even the smell of an upscale shopping mall: carpeted, multi-storied arcades with skylights lead to shops and food courts as well as outpatient clinics and intensive care units. The medical centre serves patients from the college and the surrounding rural areas, and its different types of public spaces allow visitors from diverse social backgrounds to mix and interact. One visits the hospital and somewhere else at the same time. Similar architectural hybridity can be found in contemporary workplaces, museums, airports and schools. While the unified and centred subject produced by disciplinary normalization has not disappeared, the fractured, hyphenated and decentred individuals championed by many cultural theorists can no longer simply be valorized as inherently transgressive, critical and/or marginalized; rather, we must also begin to recognize them as potentially fully functioning, highly normalized performative subjects – as multi-tasking workers, eclectic consumers, multicultural citizens, interdisciplinary students, etc. – and even as all of these at once. If discipline operated through the integration of diversity, performativity entails the diversification of integration.

As politically influential and geographically extensive as all of these performance paradigms may be individually, *the performativity of contemporary globalization is best revealed by attempts to integrate different performative criteria*. We can see one attempt at integrating multi-paradigmatic performances in the 2001 annual report summary of the Royal Dutch/Shell Group of Companies, prepared by the accounting and auditing firms of KPMG and PricewaterhouseCoopers. The title of this annual report summary is, significantly, *People, planet and profits*. Why is this title significant here? Because 'people', 'planet' and 'profits' correspond directly to the annual report's three main sections, which respectively are 'social performance', 'environmental performance' and 'economic performance'. In short, the entire annual activity of this major multinational corporation is presented and assessed for its stakeholders – and for the world at large – in terms of the integration of three different types of performance: social, environmental and economic.¹⁶

Royal Dutch/Shell's attempt to integrate multi-paradigmatic performances exemplifies the nature and functioning of performativity's operation at a global level. First, performativity is not 'one thing'; rather, it consists of many conflicting and, at times, contradictory performativities: cultural, organizational, technological, governmental, financial, environmental.¹⁷ Second, the performance stratum functions precisely through ongoing attempts to negotiate multiple and competing performativities. While Lyotard stressed performativity as optimization or the maximizing of efficiency, performativity can be better understood as 'satisficing', first theorized by Herbert Simon.¹⁸ Efficiency may often need to be compromised with other values, such as social efficacy or technological effectiveness. Decision-makers thus seek to satisfy competing demands, but because they work with limited knowledge, they must also make sacrifices; hence they *satisfice*, making not the best or optimum decision but one that is 'good enough'.

Likewise, global performativity operates through what we might call *satisficial rituals*, routinized performance review programs that consist of highly formalized attempts to measure, evaluate and improve different types of performance. Such evaluative programs are in no way limited to Royal Dutch/Shell. Quite the contrary: the focus on studying, evaluating and integrating social, environmental and economic performances is becoming increasingly important to companies and countries who dedicate themselves to sustainable development. Using guidelines established by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), some 323 organizations in 31 countries use social, environmental and economic performance measures to assess the impact their activities have on the natural environment and the social well-being of their workers, customers and communities. These organizations include small and large companies, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Now an independent organization itself, the GRI was founded in 1997 by the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies and is an official collaborating centre of the United Nations Environment Programme.

We can sense the breadth of global performativity by turning to Global Compact Performance Model developed by the United Nations. In 1999, Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced an initiative aimed at encouraging private companies to work toward sustainable and inclusive global economic development. The Global Compact focuses on three main areas of concern: human rights, labour standards and the environment. The program became operational in 2000 and is today composed of a network of five agencies. Coordinated by the Global Compact Office, it includes the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization. Currently, over 1,130 companies from 59 nations participate in the Global Compact. At the heart of the program is the goal of encouraging private companies to incorporate human rights, labour and environmental standards into their strategic planning and production processes. To this end, in 2002, a Global Compact Policy Dialog consisting of UN representatives, business practitioners, and labour and civil society organizations developed a Global Compact Performance Model:

By *model*, we mean a system of rules, practices and means to achieve a set of results. By *performance* we mean a minimum of inputs and efforts to achieve the best results in the shortest period of time. In other words this [performance model] describes a blueprint or road map to help business to embrace the Global Compact principles and move toward a satisfactory performance without detracting from their other business goals.¹⁹

Here, the dialogue group defines performance at the most general level as minimizing inputs and optimizing outputs in a timely manner. Such ‘minimaxing’ of input/output recalls Lyotard’s concept of performative optimization. At the same time, to achieve the Global Compact’s criteria of ‘satisfactory performance’, companies must negotiate between traditional business performance measures (those of organizational and financial performance) and new, emerging performance measures (environmental and

social performance, or human rights and fair labour practices). Such negotiations can be understood as satisficing rather than optimization.

The Global Reporting Initiative and the UN's Global Compact provide ample evidence of how performativity is going global and, indeed, in doing so they also reveal a final characteristic of global performativity. Performativity today operates through a complex network of social institutions, working not only at the level of nation-states, but also above them at the level of inter- and transnational organizations, such as the UN and the GRI, and below them, through businesses and NGOs. It is precisely this global networking of institutions that helps distinguish the performance stratum from the much more hierarchical and nationally-based institutions found on the disciplinary formation described by Foucault.

Conclusion

If performance describes a new epochal formation, it provides a context for understanding the complexities of audit culture. And it can, I hope, help us to think about the colliding financial, organizational, educational and cultural imperatives that shape contemporary education. But while it is important to recognize how universities around the world have been affected by financial and, more importantly, organizational forms of performance, it is also worth stressing that a wide variety of organizations have sought to incorporate educational processes into their own operation. Corporations such as Microsoft, for instance, have drawn on the university model to transform their business headquarters into 'corporate campuses', thereby stressing the challenging, educational and youth-oriented aspects of working there. At the same time, organizational development proponents seek to create 'learning organizations', institutions that not only train and educate individuals but also strive to learn *as* organizations: systems thinking, change management and total quality management strategies all stress collective and systemic learning and have been implemented in businesses, non-profit organizations and hospitals. Such developments point to the blurring of institutional borders that persistently characterizes performativity. In addition, they also point to the normative function that creativity, experimentation and diversity may paradoxically play. To survive, organizations must continually test their internal processes as well as their external borders and thus may actively encourage deviations, transgressions and differences that would have been intolerable within disciplinary institutions. Not all such diversity will be accepted, of course, but without some element of difference, organizations could not respond to changes in their environment or within themselves. Performativity, like the audit culture through which it operates, demands and produces high performance schooling.

Notes

¹ F. Allan Hanson, *Testing Testing: Social Consequences of the Examined Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p.1.

² Marilyn Strathern, 'Introduction: New accountabilities', in Marilyn Strathern [ed], *Audit*

Cultures: Anthropological studies in audit, ethics, and the academy (London: Routledge, 2000), p.2.

³ Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills [eds] (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p.241.

⁴ Strathern, 'Introduction', p.3.

⁵ I have rehearsed this general theory more fully in Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), p.xxiv [emphasis added].

⁷ Roberts, 'Rereading Lyotard: Knowledge, Commodification and Higher Education', *Electronic Journal of Sociology* (1998), <http://www.sociology.org/content/vol003.003/roberts.html>.

⁸ Roberts, 'Rereading Lyotard'.

⁹ Robin Usher and Nicky Solomon, 'Disturbing the Ivory Tower? Educational Research as Performance and Performativity', paper prepared for the Australian Association for Research in Education, 1998 Annual Conference, <http://www.aare.edu.au/98pap/sol98172.htm>.

¹⁰ Usher and Solomon, 'Disturbing the Ivory Tower?'

¹¹ Financial Accounting Standards Board, 'Discussion Questions: FASB Task Force Meeting on Financial Performance Reporting by Business Enterprises', www.fasb.org/project/discussion_paper.pdf.

¹² See Susan Stanford Friedman, "'Border Talk", Hybridity, and Performativity', *Eurozine* (July 6,

2002), <http://www.eurozine.com/article/2002-06-07-friedman-en.html#fn1>.

¹³ Robert G. Eccles, 'The Performance Measurement Manifesto', *Harvard Business Review on Measuring Corporate Performance* (Cambridge: Harvard Business School Press, 2003), p.25.

¹⁴ Evelyn Eichel and Henry E. Bender, *Performance Appraisal: A Study of Current Techniques* (New York: American Management Association Research and Information Service, 1984), pp.11–12.

¹⁵ See McKenzie, *Perform or Else*.

¹⁶ See *People, planet and profits: The Shell Report 2001 Summary* (Royal Dutch Petroleum Company and The 'Shell' Transport and Trading Company, p.l.c., 2002).

¹⁷ And the list need not stop here: there are still other paradigms of performance research, including educational, physiological, psychological, sexual and pharmaceutical paradigms.

¹⁸ See Herbert A. Simon, *Models of Man* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1957).

¹⁹ See 'A Company Performance Model for Achieving the Global Compact Principles', <http://www.uneptie.org/outreach/compact/docs/GC-Dialogue2002-Model.pdf>.

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