

Native American Indian Freemasonry and its relationship to
the performative turn within contemporary American scholarship

Abstract:

This article is informed by recent work by the author unearthing the histories of Native American Indian Freemasons from the revolutionary era to the present. Given that performed ritual has always been key to Masonic practice, it was initially supposed that Indian performance within Masonry could be explained using the same performative analytical lens that has recently been applied to various other aspects of the American and American Indian past. However, this research reveals that the performance paradigm has important limitations when applied in colonial or post-colonial contexts and that these have a particular significance when we evaluate the Native American fraternal experience of Freemasonry. This article explores the specifics of recent “performative” analyses and argues that whilst performance offers potentially revealing and enabling new means of comprehending Indian and non-Indian interaction, it also carries with it risks against which we must remain vigilant. It argues that the performance paradigm is useful only to the extent to which it can differentiate between positive cultural interaction and negative cultural appropriation. It concludes by suggesting that it is only when we conceive of culture as being essentially imaginative that performance as an analytical paradigm fully functions.¹

Perhaps surprisingly, given its self-selecting and exclusive nature, American Freemasonry has always welcomed Native American Indians that it perceived to be of a certain rank. Thus Native American Indian Freemasonry developed along regional or tribally specific lines that reflected the course of European-American intrusion, namely in the Northeast (especially among the Iroquois), the Southeast (continued in Indian Territory after removal), and in the Great Lakes area. In the Northeast, it was an important means of power play for Native leaders in the revolutionary era such as Joseph Brant (1743-1807) and in the nineteenth century Ely S. Parker (1828-1895). It is connected with the rise of American ethnology, in particular with professional Native American anthropologists such as Seneca-Iroquois Arthur C. Parker (1881-1955), Francis La Flesche (1857-1932) and John Napoleon Brinton Hewitt (1859-1937). It played a very important role within Indian Territory politics with many key Indian political figures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries all being Masons in good standing. By 1848, there was a regular lodge of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma, chartered by the Grand Lodge of Arkansas (Cherokee Lodge No.21). Masonry was again especially significant during Cherokee removal with the Cherokee Keetoowah Society, which had clear Masonic connections and fostered a unique form of pro-abolitionist religious nationalism in the years succeeding Indian removal west. By the turn of the twentieth century Freemasonry was closely associated with a key development in Indian life, the rise of urban Native American fraternal organizations. Groups such as the Loyal Order of Tecumseh and Descendants of the American Aborigine (both created within the first

intellectual pan-Indian group The Society of American Indians in 1912) as well as hybrid organizations such as the Tepee Order of America (1915) and the Indian Council Fire (1923), all had Masonic links.

The complexities of Freemasonry as a fraternal association are too varied to fully encompass here but the following working definition is a useful orientation. In the American context, Freemasonry is a self-selecting fraternity of men, developmental in terms of its activities and makeup, united by a set of social and moral values, and committed to fostering the spiritual development of its members through the practice of ritual and group solidarity. The association had deep personal meaning for key Native leaders over time, for the other ethnic groups who sought to make connection with it and for the bulk of its American membership - those drawn from the ranks of the white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant middle-class.² Significantly, while the fraternity has welcomed a high proportion of the Native American Indian elite over the centuries, Black or “Prince Hall” Freemasonry which began under warrant from the Grand Lodge of England in 1784, has remained outside of mainstream American Masonry until the mid-1990s. Black Masons in American Masonic thinking occupied a wholly separate fraternal space and time than did Native American Indian Masons, whose selective inclusion in terms of ritual, Masonic history and physical presence in the lodge was not only possible but welcomed. In the imagined kinship of international Masonry, Blacks it seems, were not an acknowledged part of the fraternal family. An expressive as opposed to instrumental form of association, Freemasonry generally functions as an end in itself, meeting the specific, dynamic social and personal needs of those involved. This theme of an essential responsiveness to the changing needs of its membership is traceable across all three of the most significant periods of Masonic strength within the United States, the revolutionary era, the last third of the nineteenth century and the years following the First World War. Mutual aid and brotherhood were and remain the fraternity’s primary concerns but after 1800 in particular its ritual and what might be termed the Masonic imagination took on a new and fundamental significance.

Whilst this is true, it is also true that ritual performance has always been at the heart of Masonic practice. Its men pass through successive optional “degrees” each of which has its own codified ritual that resonates with symbolism as well as moral and psychological direction. The original London Masonic degrees were adapted and developed as Freemasonry spread globally in the wake of the fraternity’s organisational birth in 1717. By the mid-eighteenth century, a system of thirty-three degrees were in place on continental Europe but the overall high point of creative Masonic ritual complexity and proliferation occurred between 1840 and 1860 in the United States. One explanation for this is that this was a period of massive social and economic change when men felt especially keenly the need for the compensatory feelings of control and self-mastery ritual offered. After all, within the ritual reality, everything except spiritual boundaries is clear-cut and comprehensible. In this sense, Masonic ritual offers “pure space”, a calming sanctuary from a world increasingly fluid and hybrid. Thus Masonic ritual can be said to fit perfectly with Mary Douglas’s broader characterization of ritual per se as something that works generally to contain fears of social formlessness, something that offers an unsullied and abstract arena where participants can feel noble and unpolluted.³

Such an approach helps explain the pervasive Masonic ritual emphasis upon death and symbolic rebirth. Within the lodge a man was persistently reminded of death's cold and ever-watchful hand and "re-born" ritually into the warm embrace of fraternal community. Repeatedly, Masonic rituals confronted initiates with death's degradations, surrounded them with its tools and symbols and encouraged them to think hard on its inevitability and humbling spiritual message. The Biblical character Hiram Abiff's death and resurrection in the centrepiece of all Masonic ritual, the Third Degree, was a touchstone for the repeated figurative and spiritual death and subsequent resurrection of the fraternal member as he progressed through Masonic and other fraternal degrees. The deeper the initiate was plunged into the world of death and the more he was exposed to the funereal, to skeletons, daggers and gruesome tools of execution, the more restorative and enabling his eventual symbolic rebirth was deemed to be. Thus the third degree candidate and his fellow lodge members repeatedly partook in a sort of theatre of necromancy, with candidates "dying" as Hiram and being "reborn" as newly enlightened versions of themselves. However we think about Masonic ritual what is certain is that its role within the fraternity in the United States became increasingly central and over time its enactment took on ever more theatrical forms. "The dramatic roles, the titles of the 'actors', the symbolic themes, the fraternal uniforms, the badges and tokens, the music, the lighting", as Noel Gist pointed out in 1940, "all transform the ceremony into a form of pageant which in certain occasions assumes the proportions of an awe-inspiring spectacle."⁴ Having accepted that a primary element of Masonic activity is performative, can we then apply thinking from recent intellectually reverberative work on performance to the phenomenon of Native American Indian Freemasons and if so, what is lost and what is gained in the process? Indian Masons after all, performed the same rituals as their predominantly white, middle-class associates in the same lodge spaces— can we assume that their performances are directly comparable to those of their fraternal brothers?

To answer these questions we need first to evaluate the impact of the new attention paid to performance within study of the American past. The performative approach could be said to have begun in 1993 with Jay Fliegelman's *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance*. Fliegelman is concerned with "rethinking and expanding the kinds of 'facts' that are traditionally judged to be relevant to understanding a major historical document" and set about analysing what he dubbed the "social dramaturgy" of Jefferson and his times. He argues that Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence was written to be read aloud, it was a "performative utterance," and Jefferson inserted pause marks to divide it in the same way poetry is delineated. The public readings demanded by various audiences including Congress "made the Declaration an event rather than a document." Fliegelman asks us to view Jefferson's Declaration as part of a larger "elocutionary revolution" in political discourse and public speech in England and America in the mid-eighteenth century, a shift away from classical argumentation and style towards delivery and a concern to generate emotional force and sympathy with the audience via sounds, tones, and facial expressions. His approach flies in the face of previous studies of the period such as Michael Warner's *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century America*, where, rather than the affective power of voice, the

impersonal printed word is deemed primary. Warner's depiction of a "civic and emancipatory" American print culture is analogous to the bourgeois public sphere theorized by Jurgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, whereas Fliegelman's *Declaring Independence*, with its performative emphasis, has much more in common with Garry Wills' *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* and Stephen E. Lucas's "Justifying America: The Declaration of Independence as Rhetorical Document".⁵

One of the most interesting things about *Declaring Independence* is the way Fliegelman puts the bond of sentiment and common feeling at the heart of the Revolutionary ideal. The "new rhetoric" of the era, he suggested, was rooted in contemporary, especially Scottish, aesthetic theory where the objective was to produce an involuntary response in the listener through speech. This ability to work directly on the passions of the listener was a rhetorical skill associated at the time with Native Americans and within the Masonic lodge specifically, rhetoric and the meaningful recitation of learned speech was absolutely central. Fliegelman thus provides one of the key ways to understand why Masons might permit Indians into the very heart of their exclusive, white, Protestant and predominantly middle-class organization. He quotes the contemporary thinker James Burgh on the ideal passionate, elocutionary act, "which, by influencing the will, makes one proceed to action...Like irresistible beauty, it transports, it ravishes, it commands the admiration of all...The hearer finds himself as unable to resist it as to stop the flow of a river with his hand... His passions are no longer his own. The orator has taken possession of them: and with superior power, works them to whatever he pleases".⁶

In stark contrast to this positive stereotype of Indians that tied them to the republican virtue he saw as foundational to American identity, Jefferson saw Blacks as being an emotional void, empty of and insensible to the sensibility that defined the nation. Black Americans, as noted above, were excluded from mainstream Freemasonry even though certain Indians were allowed access to its inner echelons. In part this was because in the revolutionary period Indians were deemed to be exemplary exponents of the new oratory, possessors of qualities that marked them as being capable potentially of inclusion in American political life. Fliegelman makes explicit this link between aesthetic virtue during the "elocutionary revolution" and political inclusion by referencing his fellow scholar John Barrell: "If the dominant object of both eighteenth-century oratory and fine arts was, as John Barrell puts it, 'to promote the public performance of acts of public virtue, then oratory and the arts were necessarily addressed to and produced by 'those imagined to be capable of performing such acts' - to citizens, those 'capable not only of being ruled but also of ruling'...Full membership in the republic of letters, the republic of taste, or the republic of virtue - either as producer or consumer - required prior political enfranchisement".⁷

It is important to recognize that such elevation of Indian eloquence by non-Indians served very specific purposes and only very rarely did these include actually reflecting upon the import of what Indians had to say. Jefferson venerated Indian oratory but did not hesitate to promote the policies that desecrated Indian land and displaced and dispossessed Indian communities. Yet the American veneration of individual Indian rhetorical skill that

characterized the eighteenth century came close to recognizing that Indian peoples had the aesthetic and literary abilities that in Euro-American terms qualified racial groups for nationhood. Skill in language was key to what created nations and this was especially true in the Renaissance and Enlightenment in which Freemasonry has its roots. As Benedict Anderson explains, language has the “capacity for generating imagined communities building in effect particular solidarities”. John Quincy Adams famously made the point in another form in 1805 referring to the classical era to which his contemporaries were so fond of comparing their own: “Eloquence was power”. By the terms of Fliegelman’s “elocutionary revolution” Indian rhetorical skill made individual Indian figures appear valid, admirable and even respectable. As Stephen Conn puts it in his book on the Indian’s relationship to history in the nineteenth century *History’s Shadow*, “The achievement of Indian eloquence might or might not raise the estimation of all Indians, but it had the force to make individual Indian speakers into real men”.⁸ As eloquent orators, individual Indians allowed early Americans to see the best of themselves reflected in those they considered vanquished and residual. Fliegelman’s book shows us how a culture of performance in the revolutionary era provided an avenue whereby by certain Indians might be incorporated into Freemasonry and thus into a society within society organised by the American élite.

Perhaps the most elegant and reverberative application of all to date of the performative approach has been Joseph Roach’s 1996 text *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. Roach looks at what Paul Gilroy termed the Black Atlantic – the circum-Atlantic region bounded by Europe, Africa and the Americas in terms of live performance, a phenomenon Roach conceptualizes as being highly expansive and experienced not just in theatres but everywhere people congregate. His study focuses on London and New Orleans from the late seventeenth century to the present and explores how the “orature” of those places expressed the interactions of race, class and gender. Orature seeks to dissolve the usual dichotomy between orality and literacy and stresses that each has always produced the other. Roach’s fundamental point is that historic performance survives, and in this sense so too do the dead through the bodies and performances of the living. A key example he gives is the Mardi Gras Indians – African American parade companies who perform “Native Americanness” through music, dance and costume and who create new meaning out of a shared circum-Atlantic history of genocide and slavery. Following *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* by Richard Schechner, one of the foundational figures of performance studies who suggested that performance could be seen as “restored behaviour”, Roach shows how performers have consistently regenerated and revised their history so as to imagine new identities for themselves. Roach unearths a complicated genealogy of performance within which the past is re-examined, reproduced and reinscribed. A central idea in *Cities of the Dead*, as Roach explained in an interview, is the idea of surrogation or substitution, “where one generation will stand up and stand in for another, and honor the preceding generation by quoting it, but also develop their own ideas and put in their own inventions. It’s called repetition with revision, and it resembles jazz in the way it’s played out”.⁹

Both these significant ideas - of circum-Atlantic performance and of surrogation - provide useful points of access to Native American Freemasonry over time. The

performance elements of Freemasonry crossed the Atlantic and joined together Euro-Americans and Indians at key points in the history of each. Masons and Indians used ritual relationships as a vehicle for experiencing connectedness and for generating a satisfying sense of brotherhood and reciprocity. Masonic ritual and Masonic theatre are in this sense prime examples of “circum-Atlantic performance”, a co-creation of the peoples who constituted what Roach dubs an American “oceanic interculture”. Faced with revolutionary circumstances American Masons invented themselves by performing their pasts in the presence of others. Although its extent is impossible to gauge, both Indians and Masons may be thought of as performing surrogation through ritual, enacting cultural memory through substitution. Indians of course, had compelling reasons to seek out and maintain places where cultural memory might be retained given both the central social and spiritual significance of ancestors to many Native American communities and the unprecedented levels of death and cultural erosion that beset them in the wake of successive waves of Euro-American incursion and the devastating effects of settler-borne disease and displacement. As Roach points out Black and Native-informed performance traditions (and here I include Freemasonry) remember the role of “officially forgotten...diasporic and genocidal histories of Africa and the Americas, North and South, in the creation of the culture of modernity”. Freemasonic “Indian” rituals as well as the significant correspondences between actual Indian rituals such as that of the Seneca Iroquois Little Water Society and the “traditional history” or the final ritual of the Masonic third degree, all served to intermingle things Indian and things Masonic, linking the dead with the living and the past, however constituted, with the present. This performative and to a lesser extent literary rebirth of Indian tradition within the Masonic lodge can be seen as a rehabilitation of the dispossessed, an example of what Sharon Holland characterizes in another context as “speaking from the dead”, a literature and performance in a space where it was possible for the living and the dead to “converge, mingle, and discourse”.¹⁰

This positive reading of Indian Masonic involvement links directly to Joanna Brooks’ argument in *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures* that Masonic lodges along with a host of other religious and spiritual fora, became “sites critical to the formation of modern black and Indian political, religious, and cultural consciousness”. Brooks shows convincingly that even within a wider social context that deemed Blacks and Indians degenerate and socially dependent, “communities of color” were able to “regenerate... themselves by forming separate and independent religious bodies”.¹¹ She suggests that what Black Masons were doing within their lodges was “passionate research” as Frantz Fanon describes it in his essay “On National Culture”, that is, research that is foundational to resisting imperialism, research “directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation, and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others”. Stuart Hall has taken this idea further, suggesting that such research comes in two forms, one “unearths that which the colonial experience buried and overlaid, bringing to light the hidden continuities it suppressed”; another concerns itself with the “*production of identity.. not an identity grounded in the archaeology, but in the re-telling of the past*”.¹² This last type of radical history, one that Indians and black Masons created with their Euro-American brothers, was not about inventing a fixed, or static sense of “being” but

about encouraging a perpetual and critical process of “becoming”. They were reconstituting in Masonic microcosm what being black or Indian meant socially within the United States. I would add that crucially, this was not a straightforward or predictable process and not one where either Indian or Masonic “essences” can easily be isolated; rather it was piecemeal and discontinuous. Yet it does help to explain repeated instances of Indian engagement with Masonry and individual figures’ often profound regard for it.

Consider in this regard one significant example, the Episcopal priest, community leader and Freemason, the Reverend Philip J. Deloria (Tipi Sapa/ Black Lodge, 1853-1931).¹³ In 1890, having qualified as a deacon, Deloria became an inspiring superintending presbyter of the Episcopal church’s work at Standing Rock reservation, land which straddles the western boundaries of present day North and South Dakota. He became a priest in 1892¹⁴ and worked at Standing Rock for forty years using his skills as an orator to guide his people through truly tumultuous times that included the height of the intertribal spiritual and cultural resurgence known as the Ghost Dance movement. He became a Freemason in Aberdeen lodge No. 38 at Aberdeen, South Dakota in 1911, the same year he joined the fledgling pan-tribal Indian assimilationist organisation the Society of American Indians which in turn contained a number of prominent Masons and eventually its own sub-fraternities.¹⁵ Deloria went on to gain the 32° within the Scottish Rite. As with so many important Indian men, it is not known exactly how Freemasonry figured within his life or in his case, how it gelled with his Christian faith. Many ministers of the time were Masons and there was nothing about Freemasonry’s spiritual journey that precluded a Protestant minister from taking part. Indeed, Tipi Sapa’s son, the Reverend Vine Deloria, D.D. was to continue both the Episcopal and Masonic traditions. Initiated in 1934 at Pioneer Lodge No.219 in Martin, South Dakota he would serve as grand chaplain of the Grand Lodge of South Dakota in 1946.

According to Vine Deloria Jr., his grandfather was a Mason primarily as a means of educating non-Indians about Indian ways; he wrote “Tipi Sapa became a Mason and participated in their ritual, recognizing that these kinds of relationships were a big help in influencing white society to understand his people”. (*Singing for a Spirit*, p.69) Ella Deloria scholar Susan Gardner broadly supports this idea, registering that in his daughter’s opinion her father Philip J. Deloria’s spirituality was principally pragmatic, a strategic response to conditions of unprecedented cultural attack. Three years after her father died Ella wrote: “He knew that the race, as a race, was doomed, insofar as they failed to adjust to conditions brought on by European civilization...”(Gardner, ms. p.23) Should we wonder at Deloria’s decision to adopt an alien faith, Christianity, so completely and an alien society, Freemasonry, up to the 32°, it is perhaps worth bearing in mind the psychological burdens he bore as his family’s first Euro-American-style intellectual. He was, after all, someone who fought consistently against terrific odds for his people’s welfare in the wake of generations of conflict between tribes and with the US military. Having survived brutal, forced migration, adrift in a sea of endemic corruption, bereft of their homelands and forbidden the web of spiritual practice that sustains traditional Dakota culture, the Deloria family turned to institutions that offered some semblance of the spiritual solace and kinship they had lost,- the church and the Masonic lodge. Certainly, two of Freemasonry abiding characteristics, fraternity and the absence of sectarianism, were important to Deloria since soon after his conversion he helped found an indigenous organization that gradually spread to all the Sioux

reservations, the Planting Society later known as the Brotherhood of Christian Unity. It remained active until the early 1940s. Like the Masons, Deloria's fraternity made charity key to their activities and whilst it encouraged assimilation, its primary function was to foster kinship and community amongst a people in spiritual and social peril.

It is perhaps, too easy to underestimate the burning need to replace the beauty of what had been lost within Indian communities in the post-frontier era. There was a gaping hole where once elaborate orature and a series of performative spaces within which to honour the dead had thrived. Masonry in this sense provided an arena for restored behaviour and a context for ritual, memory and the safe promulgation of Indian mores and values. Within Dakota society American expansion had left life coldly empty, bereft of energy with no available spiritual architecture to cling to. Gardner quotes Ella Deloria's comment; "What good was it now anyway, in pieces? The sun dance – without its sacrificial core; festive war dances – without fresh war deeds to celebrate- the Hunka rite of blessing little children – without the tender Ring of Relatives to give it meaning- who would want such empty leavings?...But it left him ["the" Indian] lonely, with an ache in the heart and an emptiness of soul. And then the church came and filled the emptiness to overflowing.." (Deloria in Gardner, p.22) We know that Philip Joseph Deloria, although a zealous eradicator of traditional practices especially in the early days of his conversion, also remained nostalgic for the joy and fellowship of his pre-Christian life. Just six years after his Masonic initiation as an Entered Apprentice and some nineteen years after qualifying as a priest he said he had "a terrible longing for it. [] It is very hard for a people to change their whole mode of life. Now, we just sit in camp and talk back and forth. There is nothing to do in the way of amusement, and no fun for anybody." (quoted in Gardner, 2009, p.56) For Indians like Deloria as much as perhaps for Euro-Americans in a modernizing America, Masonic life offered an important levity, pleasure and camaraderie that had been ripped away by the migration and inexorable processes of individuation that characterized the era. Masonry was an allowed means whereby "spiritual brokers" like Deloria could maintain practices in sympathy with the old tribal life, where they could luxuriate in expanded social ties reminiscent of the kinship networks of their own communities and undertake spiritual journeys on their own terms. The Indian men welcomed into the Masonic lodges of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were special people who had lived through phenomenal upheaval. A significant number sought compensation for the enormous price they paid in adopting an alien culture in the unique and assured promotional structure of the Masonic lodge, a place where they could enact, preserve and revitalise something of what they and their cultures had lost.

The pitfalls of the "performative" approach

Although it is both possible and appropriate to characterize Indian involvement in Freemasonry positively as a form of cultural adaption and survival in the face of sustained fundamental attack upon Indian spiritual and cultural life, this can be taken too far. After all Masonic Indians, right from the foundation of an American national identity, were taking part in a key social forum for the extension and propagation of colonial interests. Masonry may have allowed for a degree of cultural exchange and on occasion

for the co-creation of cultural forms by Indians and Euro-Americans in the special context of the fraternity, but this was done within what was primarily an elite context, reserved for and heavily policed by those at the heart of American power. Perhaps particularly in the eighteenth century Freemasonry served the interests of a growing state, as did, for that matter, American evangelicalism. While Freemasonry can undoubtedly legitimately be seen as a site of cultural regeneration for Indians, it is important to never lose sight of the fact that this regeneration was reserved for the few and that those Indian few were disproportionately cultural brokers operating close to or within the upper echelons of specific American communities.

This brings us to the question of to the extent to which performance as an analytical focus can or should be used to recontextualise Indian and non-Indian interaction. The issue merits close scrutiny not least because the approach has the potential to obscure the profound imbalance inherent in colonial cross-cultural exchange. For performance-orientated writers such as Joshua Bellin, Indian performance (in the nineteenth century at least) is far from uncomplex but it can literally be bundled together with that of whites, as his explanation of the title of his book *Medicine Bundle: Indian Sacred Performance and American Literature 1824-1932* suggests. One of his principal claims is that “there is no *absolute* difference between the performance of medicine by Indians and by whites, that manifestations of Indian and white medicine couple and blur in the words and works of all peoples involved in the encounter.” There is, it seems, no opportunity in terms of the lens through which Bellin views Indian performance for it to exist in a discrete sense from that of other forms of performance by non-Indians, even if that performance is perhaps a ribald pastiche or a debilitating travesty of things sacred to specific Indian groups. “The culture of Indian performance”, he states, “is a dynamic and inventive arena from which neither party, Indian nor white, can emerge without sharing and shaping the other’s medicine.”

Such an approach is welcome and enabling in the sense that it puts Indian influence at the heart of, as Bellin puts it, “the constitution of America”.¹⁶ It makes Indian peoples active rather than passive agents in the grand narrative of American national development. Generally, it draws attention to the indestructibility of certain forms of Indian practice in that it highlights how Indians found ways to incorporate abiding Indian truths into non-Indian performative forms. Furthermore, usefully, the performative turn invokes the inexpressible and brings it into scholarly discourse. As Bellin reminds us, the performance of ritual, oratory, song or dance transcends the written word and it is rooted in specific context and specific communities. This calls to mind Peggy Phelan’s recent claim that performance cannot be exactly repeated (ritual is of course repeated but each performance of it is unique and irreplaceable); “Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its ontology. Performance’s being...becomes itself through disappearance.”¹⁷

Other specific benefits accrue in the Indian context as a result of the performative approach. As an analytical lens it places emphasis upon identity as being relational and the fact that a meeting of separate cultures is in itself a prerequisite for difference to

emerge. As James Clifford put it, “Difference is an effect of inventive syncretism.” At the same time for Bellin, as indeed for Roach, performance is a phenomenon that transcends time itself and which belies the Western obsession with locating points of origin. This emphasizes the indestructible, infinitely adaptable and morphological nature of many Indian traditions, traditions which have survived repeated onslaught and in many cases have made highly successful transitions from oral to print form. In one sense the performative approach also moves us on from any bounded sense of the “middle ground”, to use Richard White’s term, away from the idea that intercultural interaction ceased with the War of 1812 or with the American Revolution, the point when “Indians ceased to have the power to force whites onto the middle ground” and were thereafter forced to live with an identity imposed upon them externally. Instead, through performance we get a strong sense as we did with Bellin’s first book *The Demon of the Continent*, of what he terms the impossibility of measuring in any meaningful way the process of “mutual acculturation” that went on before and after watersheds such as 1812.¹⁸

It is this ability to move us intellectually away from the binary oppositions inherent in ideas of race and manifest destiny that is amongst the most attractive things about the performance paradigm. Rather than viewing ethnic groups as discrete and unlinked phenomena it allows us to track how they are marked or contested irrespective of whether the culture or tradition in question passes on information generally by oral or literary means. It takes the locus of analysis away from dominant or central groups and into the interstices of relationships between cultures and groups and we are able to respond intellectually to Mikhail Bakhtin’s injunction that “the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries.” This is an awareness imported from postmodern ethnography and the work of authors such as Dwight Conquergood, James Clifford and Renato Rosaldo in which the contingent, the borrowed and the developmental elements of culture are emphasized. Clifford in particular has been keen to posit colonial or neocolonial identity as almost infinitely malleable and regenerative, writing; “Groups negotiating their identity in contexts of domination and exchange, persist, patch themselves together in ways different from a living organism. A community, unlike a body, can lose a central “organ” and not die. All the critical elements of identity are in specific conditions replaceable: language, land, blood, leadership, religion. Recognized, viable tribes exist in which any one or even most of these elements are missing, replaced, or largely transformed.”¹⁹

However, readers familiar with debates within Native American studies will feel a sense of unease at Clifford’s notion that all the elements of identity are replaceable given the long history of Indian efforts to assert the opposite, that elements such as land, language and the ability to freely practice religion are essential to the survival of specific Indian identities in specific, sacred places. Indeed Clifford eventually concludes that all identity is infinitely fluid and contextual, an intellectual position that removes certain well-worn bases for political action since it becomes impossible to argue for the rights or sovereignty of a group if its cultural identity is deemed to be invented or relational. This in turn leads us to consider problems in general with the emphasis upon “middleness”, upon the interstitial and the seemingly reciprocal nature of cultural borrowing at the heart of certain performative emphases. Some of the same critique that has been levelled at Richard White’s characterisation of the “middle ground” can be applied to performance

as an analytical lens. Cohen in “A Mutually Comprehensible World? Native Americans, Europeans, and Play in Eighteenth Century America” and Herman in “Romance on the Middle Ground” for example, have thoroughly unpicked the suggestion they find inherent in the idea of a “middle ground” that racialized hierarchies were in any way or at any point assuaged by the very fact of two cultures meeting. Rosemarie Bank has issued a similar warning against falling for the romance of performance as a phenomenon that can somehow sidestep the asymmetrical power relationships that have characterised Indian/non-Indian interaction over time. She suggests that the performative approach “in its insistence that from the beginning red and white cultures acted upon, influenced, and appropriated each other, erasing the possibility of a return for either race to an untouched (‘originary’ or ‘real’) condition, is perilous if it is assumed that the cultural stakes for red and white peoples in the internal imperialist scenario were the same.” One is reminded of the forthright warnings concerning just such elision of asymmetrical relationships of power once given by older anthropologists such as Stanley Diamond. Diamond wrote in 1974; “Civilization originates in conquest abroad and repression at home. Each is an aspect of the other. Anthropologists who use, or misuse, words such as acculturation beg this basic question. For the major mode of acculturation, the direct shaping of one culture by another through which civilization develops, has been conquest.”²⁰

In stark contrast to Bellin and Roach, Diamond argued that any diffusion of cultural traits is evidence of struggle and to view it in any other terms is false if not dangerous. He cautioned, “When...as generally happens- this diffusion is traced as an abstract exchange, somehow justified by the universal balance sheet of the imperial civilization, the assault by civilized upon primitive or traditional societies is masked, or its implications evaded.”²¹ The danger is that the performance paradigm attracts historians because it appears to offer a means of locating within the Indian record a usable version of the past that elides or assuages the specifics of cultural assault and of selective co-optation. Performance then becomes nothing more than a means of sidestepping the conundrum once articulated by the Oxford University Regius Professor of History Hugh Trevor-Roper when speaking about African history. A conventional historian committed to the primacy of archival documentation he said in 1963, “Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none; there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness... and darkness is not a subject of history”. Confronted with Africa’s indigenous oral traditions, Trevor-Roper, like Hegel before him, could find no version of history amenable to his method and so simply decided that African history did not exist. The question remains as to whether performance as an analytical approach appeals because it allows us a means of incorporating the history of indigenes and non-Europeans into a largely Euro-American story of America, a story that remains largely Euro-American because the parameters of history as praxis remain Euro-American in constitution. Yet for a number of the writers working within modern ethnography it is precisely the potential of the performance paradigm to move analysis beyond the text that is most attractive and subversive. Writing in opposition to Clifford Geertz’s influential textual model of culture, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” Conquergood suggests that performance can transform the ethnographer from detached observer into intimately involved co-performer. “The performance paradigm”, he argues, “can help ethnographers recognize ‘the limitations of literacy’ and critique the textual bias of western civilization”. While it is possible that

performance could, as Conquergood suggests “decentre” texts within analysis, it is hard to see how performance in itself is *necessarily* subversive or resistant to dominant ideologies. As Conquergood’s critic W. B. Worthen puts it, “The authority of writing and other performances as modes of cultural production is determined as much as that of speech acts is: within an elaborate, historically contingent, dynamic network of citational possibilities.”²² The same larger context of power holds true irrespective of the extent to which performance is considered to be co-created by the ethnographer and those studied.

Diamond it is worth remembering, also pointed out that imperialism *always* strives to take the guise of mutuality, to appear as a joint enterprise, as a collaboration of cultures because such a collaboration feeds into the old idea of Western cultural superiority and progress. Admonitions like Diamond’s cannot necessarily be fully refuted when considered in relation to the performance paradigm and we can only remain vigilant that while performance as an approach brings with it multiple benefits, the old but valuable critiques of inclusive history still have purchase. With this in mind it is perhaps useful to remain aware of the provenance of the concept. Like Freemasonry, performance has English roots. The genesis of the word “perform” stems from transgressions in English law over property and land seizure; thereafter the word migrated to other parts of culture such that both contracts binding in Elizabethan law and plays within the theatre came to be talked of as being “performed”.²³ Given that both the word and the idea are alien to Indian culture and given that their origins lie with the European obsession with property rights and ownership of land, scholars are well advised to proceed with caution. Any simple conflation of the interests of Indians and Masons within or outside of the Masonic lodge risks reinscribing some of the most pernicious and false colonial myths about the mutual benefits brought by the “civilising” forces on American soil.

In terms of Freemasonry as an area of study in itself, performance cannot replace other extremely valid and established approaches such as viewing the fraternity through the lens of gender or class or as part of the history of association, just as it cannot do away with structural or cultural inequalities of power. If we look closely, we find that the fundamental question at the heart of Indian-Euro-American performance is that of ownership and reciprocity, specifically the extent to which Euro-American adoption of Indian themselves within performance may have had an impact beyond what was originally intended. Using Roach’s terms, Bellin suggests that Euro-Americans sought to “embody and to replace” Indians, to conjure themselves “into illusory fullness of being by acting out what they think they are not”. Crucially for Bellin, in the process Euro-Americans became not possessors of “Indian medicine” but possessed of it. Somehow the identity of each became constitutive of the other such that “Euro-Americans and Native Americans remained locked in a struggle for the meaning, control, and use of Indian sacred performance, a struggle in which both parties grounded their being on the absent presence of the other”.²⁴ I suggest that such a reading of the early performance traditions of Indians and Euro-Americans is too close to the perfect colonial fantasy, in which the asymmetrical power relations inherent in assimilation to a dominant culture are masked by a rhetoric of mutuality and unforced exchange. In truth too often Euro-American adoption of Indian performance traditions was nothing more than what Philip Deloria terms “playing Indian”, that “characteristically American kind of domination in which the exercise of power was hidden, denied, qualified, or mourned.”²⁵ However, to ascribe

ultimate power to Euro-American activities runs the risk of reinscribing another persistent myth, that of the omnipotent state capable of erasing all vestiges of indigenous culture. We risk reiterating the kind of thinking that informed early nineteenth century ethnology in which Indian culture was deemed to be the opposite of wily, indeed entirely fragile, incapable of agency and in dire need of salvage.

The question remains as to where and when Indian traditions can be said to begin and end and at what point they can be said to have been destroyed, debased or irrevocably travestied. If, as in Bellin's analysis of nineteenth century Cherokee politics, Indian tradition is deemed to be infinite in form, encompassing both the heartfelt enemy of Cherokee removal, John Ross (a Mason), and the assimilationist, Buck Watie (Elias Boudinot, probably also a Mason), a removal treaty-signer eventually executed by fellow Cherokee as a traitor, then the question is moot. Similarly if we dispense with the customary means of positioning Indian leadership as existing at some point along a spectrum ranging from outright resistance to almost complete assimilation in relation to the dominant culture and instead go along with Bellin's suggestion that "one might better recognize that all were engaged in comparable, if not identical, acts involving the renewal of the sacred/traditional through the invented/imitated", the question arises as to what then happens to cultural politics.²⁶ Indeed what happens to basic moral questions of right and wrong in terms of the respect normally deemed to be owed to symbols and practices linked to cultural sovereignty? Can performance adequately replace or supersede politics in this sense? Although several important scholars have urged persuasively that we revision subaltern "signifying" and dispense with or learn to suspect any simplistic notion of the genuine or the "real", to view all Indian action in history primarily as performance carries with it inherent dangers. The performative lens can drain politics from the past and suggest inappropriate and unsubtle bases for comparison.

It is only if we conceive of culture as being essentially imaginative that performance as an analytical paradigm fully functions. This is how Robert Cantwell conceives of culture in his 1992 book *Ethnomimesis: Folklife and the Representation of Culture*. Cantwell argues that cultural presence is expressed through *ethnemes*- signifiers like music, costume and speech that may be divorced from their indigenous community but that are compatible with some prejudice or stereotype held by their audience. For Cantwell, within the "cultural ecosystem of stereotype" a "resolving synthesis" can be arrived at whereby relationships of power are destabilized and the performer can dissolve the space between himself and the audience. But even here questions that are political and economic rather than primarily imaginative impinge. Performance cannot fully disguise or supplant hierarchy. As Andrew Scheiber puts it, the issues still remain: "Who is looking, and who is performing? And under what duress, or with what privileges?" The larger political hierarchies that bear down upon culture and its presentation isolated by Rosaldo still apply. In all performance it matters who makes themselves visible and in what ways such visibility is made permissible by the dominant culture. Rosaldo points that culture in itself is a phenomenon recognised or not recognised at the whim of those who dominate and that those who have culture have also tended to occupy subordinate positions within nation-states. He writes, "Full citizenship and cultural visibility appear to be inversely related. When one increases, the other decreases. Full citizens lack culture, and those most culturally endowed lack full citizenship." Culture and the permitted

expression of culture he links directly to “imperialist nostalgia” in dominant cultures – “the process of yearning for what one has destroyed.”²⁷

In sum performance as an analytical stance within Native American studies is liable to many of the same critiques that have been leveled at the free-flowing circulation of signs described by poststructuralism and at ideas of syncretism and hybridity more generally. The former has been deemed uncomfortably close to a perfect notion of capitalist exchange and the latter, because they deem identity to be re-creatable and invented from multiple sources, as making identity seem similarly infinitely interchangeable. Perhaps the main problem with performance analytically is that it has been used as an indiscriminate and blanket term. The boundaries of performance’s utility within Indian studies can be said to lie with the extent to which what is being performed represents a positive and generative intercultural sharing and, at the other end of the spectrum, the extent to which it might represent yet another example of colonial appropriation and greed. The spectre in this regard is that of cultural cannibalism, a phenomenon with a long and slippery history in colonial relations. After all, the subject of loquaciousness with which we opened our discussion of Masonic Indians of the eighteenth century was an attribute not only ascribed to those deemed potentially capable of citizenship; it was also ascribed to the bogey man of the “New World” – the indigenous cannibal. Deemed to be present in America right from “discovery”, the cannibal was in great part a projection of the all-consuming European invader. It would be the invader’s insatiable appetite for all things Indian that would dominate the succeeding centuries and our challenge today is to remain alert to that long and ongoing history of appropriation. Deborah Root, in *Cannibal Culture* warns against seeing cannibalism as a phenomenon limited to the past. “It is also useful”, she suggests, “to extend the definition of cannibalism to forms of consumption that occur beyond the physical body of the individual or even the community. It is possible to consume somebody’s spirit, somebody’s past or history, or somebody’s arts and to do so in such a way as that the act of consumption appears beautiful and heroic”.²⁸ Deciding which examples of performance were indeed positive intercultural co-creations and which were in fact examples of conscious or unconscious cultural cannibalism is the foremost challenge for those applying the performance paradigm to things Indian in the future.

¹ The author thanks Professor Judy Newman of the School of American & Canadian Studies, University of Nottingham for prompting her to consider Native American Freemasonry in connection with the performance paradigm.

² Mary Ann Clawson has provided good evidence of groups such as the Knights of Pythias towards the end of the nineteenth century that were cross-class and of male fraternity providing an alternative to class differentiation (*Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender and Fraternalism*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989, 104-5). However the costs of repeated initiation and of membership suggest that Freemasonry was predominantly a middle-class phenomenon.

³ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London: Routledge, 1966.

⁴ Noel P. Gist, *Secret Societies: A Cultural Study of Fraternalism in the United States*, Columbia: University of Missouri Studies, 15 (4), October 1, 1940, p.81.

⁵ Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959, 3, 48. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 1962 translation by Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press,

1989. Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*, New York: Doubleday, 1978; Stephen E. Lucas's "Justifying America: The Declaration of Independence as Rhetorical Document" in *American Rhetoric: Context and Criticism*, ed. Thomas W. Benson Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989.

⁶ Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*, 32.

⁷ Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*, 194-95.

⁸ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, New York: Verso Press, 1983, 133; Adams quoted in Sandra M. Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, xiii; Steven Conn, *History's Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, 86.

⁹ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996; "xii. Joseph Roach Talks to Ned Sublette." Available at www.afropop.org/multi/interview/ID/68/Joseph+Roach+talks+to+Ned+Sublette.

¹⁰ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 4; Sharon P. Holland, *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

¹¹ Joanna Brooks, *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of Africa-American and Native American Literatures*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, 48, 46, 12, 147, 150.

¹² Franz Fanon, "On National Culture" in *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove, 1963, 210; Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". In *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 393-94.

¹³ Another relative, the Reverend Vine V. Deloria was also a Freemason. See Philip J. Deloria, "Vine V. Deloria Sr., Dakota", In *The New Warriors: Native American Leaders Since 1900*, edited by R. David Edmunds. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001, p. 85 and Ray V. Denslow, *Masonic Portraits*. Jefferson MO: Board of Publication for the Missouri Board of Research, 1972, p.152-157.

¹⁴ See Owanah Anderson, *400 Years: Anglican/Episcopal Missions among American Indians*, Cincinnati OH: Forward Movement, 1997, p.106.

¹⁵ For more on the Society of American Indians which listed key Indian figures of the era such as Charles Eastman (Freemason), Carlos Montezuma (Freemason), Thomas Sloan, and Arthur Hewitt amongst its membership see Porter J., *To Be Indian : The Life of Iroquois-Seneca Arthur Caswell Parker*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001, chapter five and the references therein.

¹⁶ Joshua D. Bellin, *Medicine Bundle: Indian Sacred Performance and American Literature, 1824-1932*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, 9, 2

¹⁷ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 146.

¹⁸ Joshua D. Bellin, *The Demon of the Continent: Indians and the Shaping of American Literature*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, 11, 121; Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires & Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1813*, Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1991, xv;

¹⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Trans. Vern W. McGee, Austin: University of Texas, 1986, 2; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 338.

²⁰ Kenneth Cohen, "A Mutually Comprehensible World? Native Americans, Europeans and Play in Eighteenth Century America", *American Indian Quarterly*, 26, 2002, 67-93; Daniel J. Herman, "Romance on the Middle Ground", *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, 1999, 279-91; Rosemarie K. Bank, *Theatre Culture in America 1825-1860*, Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1997, 463.

²¹ Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization* New Brunswick: Transaction, 1974, 1.

²² Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Past and Present: History and Sociology," *Past and Present*, 42, 1969, (3-17) quote page 6; Dwight Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics," *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 58, page 179-94, June 1981, quotations 188, 190; W.B. Worthen, "Drama, Performativity, and Performance," *PMLA*, Vol 113, No.5 Oct. 1998, (1093-1107), quote page 1099.

²³ The transgressive element in performance has been highlighted by John McKenzie in *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*, London: Routledge, 2004; the legal roots of performance as an idea have been explored by Oliver Gerland in "From Playhouse to p2p Network: The History and Theory of

Performance under Copyright Law in the United States.” *Theatre Journal*, 59, No. 1, 2007: 75-95, quote p.83.

²⁴ Joshua Bellin, *Medicine Bundle*, 25.

²⁵ Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, 187.

²⁶ Joshua Bellin, *Medicine Bundle*, 128.

²⁷ Cantwell, *Ethnomimesis: Folklife and the Representation of Culture*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992; 226, 181; Andrew J. Scheiber, “Mirrors and Menageries: Criticism, Ethnography, and Multiculturalism in Contemporary Literary Praxis,” *American Literary History Review*, 50, no.1 1944: 1-25, quotation 369; Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, Boston: Beacon, 1989; 198,199,71.

²⁸ Deborah Root, *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996, 18.

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