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Afterword: Sovereign and Critical Grammars

Michael Saward

According to the late ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel (1967: 11), all modes of social expression and practical action are 'contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life'. The structures and actions of political life are no exception. As accomplishments, they are regular and predictable in many ways but never inevitable, never structurally determined beyond the actions, motives, and understandings of participating and observing individuals. To use the key concept of this volume, grammars of politics – sets of 'recognizable rules or codifications that facilitate communication' (Rai and Reinelt) – are critical to the ongoing accomplishments of political life, be they the maintenance of particular orders or structures, or the disruption, displacement or alteration of those orders or structures. Those grammars are performed, or are deeply implicated in performances which can sustain or produce distinctive social and political orders (or their effective disruption). Performances constitute politics, deploying grammars (rules, codifications) to sustain familiar political understandings and to generate new ones. I shall refer to the phenomenon within which such grammars are enacted as 'performative politics', a phrase intended to draw attention to both the theatrical and productive (or constitutive) elements of performance in and of politics. Performative politics combines the theatrical *with* the productive: it is rehearsed or repeated citational action designed to, or with the effect of, drawing special attention to the alleged existence and character of entities such as nation-states.

This Afterword looks back over the rich array of grammars described or revealed in the preceding chapters. One volume cannot, of course, claim to offer a full or systematic account of such grammars. Further, as the Editors' Introduction notes, grammars of performative politics shift and change, and expand and contract in their scope and importance. Nonetheless, the diversity and cross-disciplinary character of the chapters brings to light a fascinating set of grammars of politics and performance, and prompt critical questions about the relations between politics and performance. In this chapter I aim to map the grammars which emerge, before stepping back to ask key questions about the achievements of performance in and of politics: (1) what do different grammars of politics and performance

constitute, focusing on the subject, objects and audiences of politics; (2) what do they seek to make perceptible, temporally, spatially and otherwise? (3) What role do such grammars play in the attempt to generate political legitimacy? And (4) in what ways do different grammars, fuelled by widely varied motives and intentions, overlap, borrow and even mirror each other?

Sovereign and critical grammars

I begin with a two-part picture of the grammars of performative politics which is, admittedly, over-simplified; I do so in order to anchor more effectively subsequent discussion which renders a more multi-sided and nuanced picture. *Sovereign grammars* are those which are deployed in the performative politics of the state or other established and constituted authorities. *Critical grammars* are those which are deployed in the performative politics of actors who question, criticise or seek to transform the foundations, dominant understandings of sovereign or authoritative structures.

As revealed across the chapters in this volume, sovereign grammars play strongly towards the general and the homogenous, a large-scale (often national) sense of oneness or commonality of attachment or belonging. Ritual and ceremony play key roles – from elements of parliamentary procedure to national anthems – and carefully controlled (and often consistently repeated) spaces, scripts and settings are used. Sovereign grammars also include modes of deflection of attention away from the sorts of questionable actions that might be justified by 'raisons d'état'.

Critical grammars, on the other hand, tend to particularise citizens and others, as individuals and/or as members of distinct sub-groups (e.g. as 'indigenous people' or other minorities), and to do so in ways that lend them an often problematic or challenging specificity. They tend to the more temporary, and to the more spontaneous. The use of spaces is less predictable, and while often loaded with symbolic meaning may include demonstrations, protests and occupations of spaces. Sometimes the use of space will assert a political dimension about place or people where the latter are not normally identified or thought of as political. An assertion of presence, often an unsanctioned presence, can be crucial, not least as one way of asserting an uncharacteristic or unusual visibility of a people or a claim. Asserting the significance of particular spaces, identities, and claims can also be an assertion that new or different publics are being formed, or exist, which need to be taken into account politically.

What do grammars constitute?

A key sovereign objective of performative politics seeks to constitute the citizen body as one. This effect is often achieved or sought through repeated deployment of appropriate grammars. The success of political performances depends, as Derrida points out, on successful 'citation' or 'iteration' of cultural codes or signs (1988, 15-17). Failure is a 'necessary possibility' (Derrida 1988, 15); performatives must, in other words, draw on cultural resources with their own instabilities, conflicts and weaknesses – iterability 'is at once the condition and the limit of mastery' (Derrida 1988, 107). The provisional success of a performative gains authority 'through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices' (Butler 1997, 51).

The care with which public authority is variously staged and scripted through sovereign performances (Parkinson) has an encompassing element, designed to be visible and to reach all parts of the polity and all citizens of the polity in a common manner. This is a double process of constituting subjects and objects; through staging and scripting, the state (subject) is made to stand for the people (object) in a process of political and/as aesthetic representation, and at the same time citizens are made to stand for the state, or to bear or symbolise state authority through citizenship. Sovereignty works through a grammar of a single unified narrative of state and citizen, as subject and object (Heidecke); there is only one 'we' (Nield). There is an ideal-typical citizen characteristic and outlook, one which confirms and conforms to a singular and to some degree homogenised picture – idealised 'should be' images and personas are offered to citizens as mirrors for their own characters (Weber). (This is not to deny that, in states which have clear – however thin – liberal and democratic elements, there is a surface acceptance or celebration of differentiation or diversity *and* the deeper assertion of a common and homogenised citizen-character, as Weber's critique of the US post-September 11 public service campaign makes clear).

Both ceremony and ritual in different forms are closely linked sovereign grammars. A key feature of sovereign rituals is their depersonalised character; rituals partake of participant status and the significance of transitions and contexts, and not the specific personalities involved in them. For example, ritual often involves 'correct execution of ritualised speech moments' involving generic forms of words (Finlayson). As such, their tenor as performative grammars is to apply (in principle equally) to all, thereby reinforcing a common sense of we-ness. Rituals may reassert authority, possibly in an outwardly reconfigured form, in times of

tension or crisis (Lynch, Edelman), may dignify parliamentary procedures (Rai), and may act as a grammar of unanswerable emotive force (Edelman).

In short, sovereign grammars of performative politics (seek to) constitute a unity out of potential, and even acknowledged, diversity – a unity of citizen character types, of destiny, of belonging, of permanent authority and its locus. In doing these things, such grammars also seek to constitute an audience out of citizen subjects-objects, an appreciative, accepting and inclusive set of observers or recipients of sovereign performances, who even in the more passive mode as an audience will act upon recognition of the performed authority.

What do critical grammars constitute?

On the evidence of the preceding chapters, critical grammars of performative politics seek to constitute an array of subjects and objects. They may assert the active, potentially awkward or non-cooperative citizen against the more passive subject-citizen noted in the previous section (Reinelt). They may constitute new notions of publics or 'counterpublics' (Reinelt, Nield), and in that way also constitute 'the alternative'. In this way, alternative "we's" are offered or claimed. The subjects making up these alternative collectives may be characterised more strongly as agents, with distinctive capacities which derive from their assertion and not from one or other form of sovereign grant. They may likewise assert particular citizen identities, drawing upon and potentially subverting sovereign image-making as they do so (Weber's alternative takes on 'I am an American' reverse the sovereign 'out of many, one', to assert 'out of one, many). They may assert the importance of situated and lived experience against abstract and idealised sovereign conceptions of appropriate experience, and in so doing highlight vulnerabilities that are glossed over in dominant characterisations of citizens as both subjects and objects (Fitzpatrick). In short, critical grammars are often put to work in the assertion of (a) agentic unpredictability, (b) unacknowledged or overlooked capacity for independent questioning, thinking, and action, and (c) issues and tensions arising from particular perspectives and lived experiences which pose a direct challenge to homogenising, 'flattening' sovereign discourses of citizenly attributes and the terms of belonging.

Sovereign grammars of visibility, time and space

Political visibility, like other political phenomena, is an accomplishment. Sometimes political invisibility is an accomplishment too. In other words, these are intended or unintended

achievements of practices, many of which are performances. What is seen (or perceived), and where and when, partake of grammars of performative politics. Sovereign grammars favour the 'legislative chamber', the 'conference room' and the 'committee room', literally perhaps, and metaphorically too as spaces of predictability, order and enforced procedure. Grammars using such specific spaces emphasise visible control as well as exhibiting a certain regime of visibility in the form of a stable hierarchy of visibility and significance of places. Secrecy and diversion of attention may seem to be the opposite of such controlled modes of visibility, but as Harding points out there is a 'secrecy effect' which can add to a diffuse sense of sovereign knowingness and power. The regularity of sovereign visible performances - such as ceremonies which by their nature are highly visible - in appropriate spaces and at appropriate times (or intervals) further reinforces interpretations of place as mattering, or if invisible as not mattering (Nield). These sovereign grammars are crucial to the sustaining of sovereign authority; as Finlayson notes, in modernity (even if 'all that is solid melts into air' is exaggerated) authorities have to work hard and continuously to establish authoritative interpretations of space and time as rightly dominant.

Critical grammars of visibility, time and space

Critical grammars of visibility, time and space appear to offer a sharp contrast to sovereign grammars. The accomplishment of visibility in time and space is often one of assertion against the current of sovereign grammars which normalise and regularise the times and spaces of political assertion. This was sharply the case, for example, in the use of theatre to reclaim a form of public sphere in besieged Sarajevo (Jestrovic). Visibility is more precarious, and potentially more ephemeral, in the form of demonstrations, protests and 'stunts' for example (Parkinson). Selective, targeted and creative use of varied media, such as asserting 'critical difference' through film (Weber), or using fiction to achieve visibility (Heidecke), may be crucial to the uncertain achievement of a measure of visibility. Grammars of appropriation and exposure – often targeting selectively elements or materials of sovereign grammars – may be crucial in such efforts (Weber), along with the closely related notion of 'manipulating theatrical strategies' (Nield).

The uses of space and place emerge as crucial elements in critical grammars, and crucial in particular to the achievement of political visibility. Naming and renaming spaces may be one key performative strategy (Nield), and likewise directly appropriating controversial spaces in order that they be seen and experienced in a new light (Fitzpatrick). Sometimes separate

from and at other times aligned with such grammars is that of occupation; indeed, occupation as a grammar may make creative use of the symbolism of 'permanency' which accompanies sovereign grammars of the spaces of power, challenging the idea of temporary protest by at least mimicking the grammar of assumed continuing (rightful) presence. It is worth noting that the fact that critical grammars are often involved in the temporary rather than the permanent, or the temporary mimicking the permanent, does not imply that more sporadic, unpredictable or precarious critical grammars in action are somehow weaker in comparison. By regularising and normalising the spaces and times (and time-spans) of power, sovereign grammars leave themselves exposed in principle to creative and assertive acts which (suddenly, surprisingly, counter-intuitively) assert particular temporalities (see Edkins on the temporality of suffering and trauma) or a troubling significance of spaces such as the Irish laundries (Fitzpatrick).

Generating political legitimacy

Working in a broadly inductive way, I have sought to tease out some of the key grammars of performative politics which the chapters reveal, describe and appraise. The key questions guiding the identification of grammars have focused on those emerging from the varied analyses: the constitution of subjects, objects and audiences (in short, identities), and the performative deployments of, and challenges to, time, space and visibility. To locate grammars of performative politics in this way is to try to identify the strategies and effects of performances. But we can take this one further, important step. Visibility and identity (for example) are generated through performance, notwithstanding the multiplicity of intentions and motivations behind performance, and the fact that the intentionality of performance is not necessarily attached to the performers. That purpose can be captured in the desire or need to generate political legitimacy. Itself a complex concept and phenomenon, my focus here is on political legitimation as process and perception: the presence of legitimacy as an ongoing and always incomplete process (legitima*tion*), and as a matter of perceptions of participating and implicated actors rather than as an independently-derived or extra-contextual standard. Taking the sovereign and critical grammars identified across the volume, what are their intended, hoped-for or potential products with respect to the generation of political legitimacy? (Note that I do not claim that legitimacy *is*, or *was*, produced in any particular case; rather, that we can identify some key effects of performative grammars which may act as legitimacy-generating factors).

Legitimacy and sovereign grammars

We can identify a range of potentially legitimacy-producing factors arising from sovereign grammars. The generalizability or universality which sovereign grammars often perform – 'out of all, one' – may generate a sense or perception of *inclusion*. Inclusion, in turn, carries a suggestion of *equality* at a foundational level, even if a polity exhibits a range of formal and informal inequalities between citizens (and between citizens and other residents). The grammars of regularity and predictability may generate perceptions of *stability*, as well as of ready or ever-present and stable forms and loci of *authority*. A number of sovereign grammars partake of ritual and ceremony, in varied forms (from the spoken to the displayed). Such performances may generate perceptions of *dignity* and *significance*; performances that are repeated and granted importance by those who organise, lead or otherwise participate in them suggest or imply significance beyond the moment of performance itself, a capturing of some elusive but fundamental character of the polity which is worthy of recognition and acceptance (Rai). Ceremony can likewise contribute to a sense of *transcendence* of the particular (implying the presence of something like Rousseauian general will above and beyond particular wills). The unified sovereign narratives, the repeated performances of 'we, the people', underline such potential achievements by reiterating *commonality*. Performances of secrecy too imply authority, knowledge and power – the polity knows things, has access to things, some of them of such importance that it protects or hides them while showing that it does so (Harding).

Sovereign grammars may also generate ideal identities for conscious (or sub-conscious) emulation or absorption, reinforcing a sense that particularity is outweighed by selected images of what the people are, together, or what values and projects they can or should hold in common. These may be fictionalised experiences or characterisations, of course, but they are presented or performed as real reflections of pre-existing identities or attributes of citizens and leaders. Finally, the state can use such sovereign grammars to represent cleansing, renewal and change; they can perform a new or renewed political order, as in the example of truth and reconciliation commissions (Lynch).

Legitimacy and critical grammars

Oppositional or alternative political actors, deploying critical grammars, have different senses of legitimacy to generate through performance. In a range of important cases, they need to

attempt to puncture sovereign grammars, to assert particularity and presence. Critical grammars may generate legitimacy by generating force, momentum and resonance through particularity and presence. The attempt to construct *counterpublics* is interesting in this context – 'publics' are resonant of important political actors, with claims that ought to be heard (Reinelt). We-ness is politically powerful, and critical grammars can generate powerful senses that there are alternative "we's" to the sovereign, homogenised collective image (Heidecke; Nield). Such grammars may also generate a sense of the active and/or activist citizen, carrying a sense of *dynamism* and *conviction*. Non-sovereign *agency*, or the possibility and potential of agentic autonomy within or despite the blanket coverage of sovereign authority, may be generated. Related to this is the assertion of difference, which may appeal to observers as approaching a (subjective or inter-subjective) sense of *authenticity* through particularity and the recognition of difference (Weber). Indeed, one might reasonably summarise the contrast between sovereign and critical grammars with respect to legitimacy as one between performing authority, on the one hand, and performing authenticity, on the other.

Borrowed grammars and hidden opposites

Just as exceptions can prove a rule, so some of the most interesting aspects of grammars of politics and performance identify moments where the sovereign/critical distinction breaks down, or is hybridised in practice. It is no contradiction to say that, for example, the most effective deployment of the sovereign grammars identified above may be supported by the strategic use of the critical grammars; likewise, selective nods in the direction of sovereign grammars may be perceived as useful by the state's or government's critics as they seek to sustain or extend their visibility or a sense of the significance of their message. For example, the use of more personal, 'authentic' identities within grammars of sovereign authority is not at all unusual, especially in times of widespread disillusion with established political structures and leadership. Individual leaders are offered as real people, with public convictions that stem from their personal experiences or passions. It is often a fine line to tread, but such developments do not undermine the notion of more depersonalised sovereign grammars; rather, the account of the leader with the three-dimensional personality we are often given (always a selective account, to be sure) gains whatever salience or currency it can muster *by virtue of* its momentary and artful departure from permanent or background sovereign grammars.

Similarly, actors deploying critical grammars will at certain moments seek to 'borrow' from the arsenal of sovereign grammars, to gain (or so it is often hoped) a sense of persistent importance, transcendent significance, or authority that the distinctive particularity of their assertions might lack by their very nature. The generating and use of (e.g.) protest rituals may be one instance. A sense of collectivity – a different 'we' that may even be asserted as a direct challenge to characterisations of the sovereign 'we' – taps into an important element of sovereign grammars. Consider for example that the occupation of public buildings and running up national flags characterised anti-government, pro-Russian dissent in eastern Ukraine in 2014. Further examples may include the use of the slogan 'Not in our name' in the demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq in the United Kingdom, and the use of 'We are the 99%' in the discourse of Occupy (Nield).

The possibility – sometimes, politically, the necessity – of 'borrowing' alternative grammars of performative politics arises in part from a background sense of 'hidden opposites'. We need to exercise care in the analysis here, resisting any easy background functionalism which assumes a neat equal and opposite equation between a given set of sovereign grammars and a given set of critical grammars. Nonetheless, we can argue that (1) for any specific grammar of performative politics, (2) an opposite can be identified, construed or constructed, which can (3) be deployed strategically against that grammar. For example, a crucial sovereign claim is that of representing the (single, overarching) collectivity. A hidden opposite may be the silencing effect that can accompany representation: if for instance elected parliamentarians speak or stand for you, it is assumed that you do not need to (or are not ordinarily expected to) speak or stand for yourself, even if you think the elected officials are misrepresenting you. Similarly, if 'horizontality' is a spatial metaphor that forms part of some alternative social and political movements, notably in recent years Occupy, then sovereign authorities can and do assert the hidden opposite, verticality (e.g. 'the horizontal is fine, but how do you govern in the end without specialisation of tasks and functional and organised locations of collective decisional authority?'). Or consider for example planning and spontaneity, consensus and conflict, reinforcing and contesting accounts of the significance of place, and so on.

For a given political actor, individual or collective, selective borrowing and deploying the hidden (or, as the case may be, not so hidden) opposite may be understood as alternative strategies in ongoing political struggles.

Conclusion

Political scientists and political theorists have often made easy nods in the direction of theatricality and acting in politics. Playing off centuries-old prejudices – stemming from Plato, revived and refined by Rousseau (1960), and ironically reinforced by a key work in the contemporary concept of performativity, Austin's *How To Do Things With Words* (1975) – the presence of theatricality in politics was often summarily condemned as non-serious, or non-genuine. For all its diversity, the discipline of performance studies has a strong and laudable tradition of radical political comment. Arguably, political scientists and political theorists need to take performance in politics seriously, and performance studies scholars to take performance in mainstream politics seriously alongside radical or marginal actors and critiques. This is one core thread to arise from this volume. The grammars of performance and politics are complex modes through which performances are constructed and construed, and by which they may be rendered effective or ineffective. I have suggested that a distinction between sovereign grammars and critical grammars of performance and politics arises from the rich variety of cases and arguments presented in the volume – so long as we understand that political actors and political observers will and should disrupt such ready distinctions at important points in their activities. Users of sovereign grammars may focus above all on generating a sense of authority, and those of critical grammars a sense of authenticity. But each will also, in varied ways, look to strategic use of grammars that are meat and drink to its opponents and critics.

Embracing both mainstream and critical actors and performances, the chapters in this book illustrate the rich variety of performances in politics. At the same time, by developing the notion of grammars as rules or codifications that foster communication, the book provides a crucial focus for analysing the nature and impact of performative politics. We look forward to continuing theoretical development of the idea of grammars, not least how their status as 'rules' fosters both rigid and flexible modes of performative politics. Armed with these tools, future research may explore further particular grammars, and continue to trace the development of new and hybrid grammars, not least those enabled by new communication technologies. It may also usefully examine the uneasy 'dance' of sovereign and critical grammars – when, how, why and to what effect they contrast, overlap, or borrow from each other. In a highly performative world, continuing to generate new insights into performative politics is critical to our ability to grasp the changing nature of politics itself.

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