

Toward a Theory of Emotive Performance: With Lessons from How Politicians Do Anger*

KWAI HANG NG

University of California, San Diego

JEFFREY L. KIDDER

Northern Illinois University

This article treats the public display of emotion as social performance. The concept of “emotive performance” is developed to highlight the overlooked quality of performativity in the social use of emotion. We argue that emotive performance is reflexive, cultural, and communicative. As an active social act, emotive performance draws from the cultural repertoire of interpretative frameworks and dominant narratives. We illustrate the utility of the concept by analyzing two episodes of unrehearsed emotive performances by two well-known politicians, Bill Clinton and Jiang Zemin. The two cases demonstrate how emotion can be analyzed as a domain in which culturally specific narratives and rhetorics are used to advance the situational agenda of actors. The concept opens up a more expansive research agenda for sociology. It pushes sociologists to pay greater attention to people’s experiences, interpretations, and deployments of emotions in social life.

Emotion is often regarded, even among sociologists, as the quintessential outlier phenomenon. It is considered too abrupt, unpredictable, and instinctual to have connections with our otherwise disciplined lives. This is so despite the works of social psychologists and anthropologists who have long argued that emotions suffuse all aspects of social life. As a result, while sociologists have a very good understanding of how our normal routines reproduce society and how we manage emotion to maintain a state of normalcy, we know much less about how individuals and society interact in emotionally charged moments that are outside of “ordinary” experience.

A growing number of sociologists working in different areas (Barbalet 1998; Berezin 2009; Collins 2004; Goodwin et al. 2001; Massey 2002; Polletta 2001; Scheff 1990) are beginning to question the problematic status traditionally accorded to emotion. This article echoes the collective call, shared among these authors, to take emotion not so much as a special area attended to only by social psychologists but as a feature of everyday life. The slight given to emotion by sociologists has much to do with the limited and constraining imagery of emotion as unharnessed, non-rational impulses. The reflexive, meaning-making aspect of emotional expression—a more promising topic of sociological inquiry—remains understudied. As Jan Stets

*Address correspondence to: Kwai Hang Ng, Department of Sociology, University of California, San Diego, 9500 Gilman Dr., La Jolla, CA 92093-0533. E-mail: kwng@ucsd.edu; or to Jeff Kidder, Department of Sociology, Northern Illinois University, Dekalb, IL 60115. E-mail: jkidder@niu.edu. Special thanks to the editors and anonymous reviewers of *Sociological Theory*, John Evans, Isaac Martin, and Michael Schudson, for their insightful comments and criticism. The first author also wants to thank the participants in his graduate seminar “Research Praticum” in 2008 for their comments. This work was supported by research grants from the Department of Sociology and Academic Senate, UCSD.

and Jonathan Turner point out in a recent review, there is surprisingly little in the way of concrete analysis of specific emotion ideologies, vocabularies, and rules (Stets and Turner 2008:44).

The challenge confronting a sociological reconceptualization of emotion is to turn back the tide that devolves the concept into the abyss of sheer impulses or irrational drives. To address this, we develop a notion of emotive *performance* that places stress on the connection between cultural repertoire, reflexivity, and effervescent emotional responses. We see emotion, to paraphrase Goffman, as something that has to be “enacted and portrayed,” as something that has to be “realized” in performance (1959:75). The notion of emotive performance highlights the fact that far from “losing it,” people often deploy emotion reflexively to advance their situational agenda. Yet, at the same time, the concrete expression of emotion is navigated through familiar cultural idioms.

In the latter part of this article, we illustrate our approach by showing how two well-publicized episodes of emotionally, one featuring former Chinese President Jiang Zemin and the other former U.S. President Bill Clinton can be approached as emotive performance. When politicians display strong or “negative” emotions in public (as in our two cases), the media often describe them as suffering a “meltdown” or “losing it.” They are, in a paradoxical way, symptomatic of the rationalist orientation of modern-day politics. There is a strong commitment to weed out any spontaneous display of emotion from the public space that commands confidence by virtue of its rationality (Solomon 1976). Politicians are expected by the public to be passionate and compassionate, but being emotional is a different thing. Emotion is said to be harmful to a mature political process.

We argue that a closer examination of the two cases, however, shows how emotions are channeled in social life—emotions are reflexive, communicative, and cultural. Precisely because of the rationalistic milieu in which we live, it has become increasingly unacceptable for social actors nowadays to just *show* emotion (an oft-used label for the sheer showing of emotion is “hysteria”; see Whalen and Zimmerman 1998). Performing emotion has become a form of highly scrutinized self-disclosure in which the actor is clearly aware of the scrutiny bestowed. The dominant mode of displaying emotion in public features a constant back-and-forth of *showing* and *telling*. It is therefore sociologically obsolete to uphold the dichotomy between raw emotions on the one hand and rationality on the other. The reflexive, sometimes even tactical use of emotion, we argue, is an integral feature of our modern social lives.

Analytically, performance represents a genre of social practices where the performer assumes responsibility to an audience for a display of persuasiveness. A performance is an act that is laid open for evaluation for the way that it is done (Alexander et al. 2006; Bauman 1986; Denzin 2003). Felicitous emotive performances feature narratives that organize experiences in ways that are culturally meaningful and recognizable.

Our emphasis in this article differs from the spate of empirical works inspired by Hochschild’s influential theory of emotion management (Hochschild 1979; 1983). The focus of Hochschild’s theory is on how socially imposed “feeling rules” inhibit self-initiated, authentic emotion or the lack thereof. People *labor* to turn up positive, desirable emotions and *labor* to work down *undesirable* emotions. “Emotion work” is thereby an effortful exercise whose long-term collateral damage is self-alienation and inauthenticity. Following her lead, researchers have made important contributions in identifying a variety of postindustrial occupations where emotional management has, either implicitly or explicitly, become part of the job

portfolio, such as the work of waitresses (Erickson 2004), fast food workers (Leidner 1993), paralegals (Pierce 1995), and supermarket cashiers (Rafaeli and Sutton 1987), among others (for overviews, see Loseke and Kusenbach 2008; Steinberg and Figart 1999).

We argue that cultural and social rules are not just at work in *managing* emotion; they are equally crucial in *performing* emotion. To say that emotion is performative is to say that emotion is an active social act that draws from the cultural repertoire of interpretative frameworks and dominant narratives. In this regard, we see our turn to performance as a crucial step to push the cultural thesis further. A strong theory of culture suggests that culture is at play not just before and after emotional interactions but also right at the peak of them (Thoits 1989), that is, when people *are* emotional and showing it.

We believe this reconceptualization can open up new avenues of investigation for sociology. For example, in social movements theory, treating emotion as performative can help to make sense of how highly organized, strategized protests can be *at once* understood as direct attempts to articulate emotions (e.g., anger over the use of animals in scientific experiments or the behavior of political leaders), and to simultaneously persuade others that such emotions are justified (Goodwin et al. 2001). Or in urban sociology, sociologists have long noted the emotional ties city inhabitants can have to their neighborhoods, even if outsiders see the areas as utterly maligned or dysfunctional (Gans 1962; Small 2004; Venkatesh 2000). But missing from urban ethnographies is an adequate model for how emotions are actually performed in everyday life. More recently, sociologists have begun to give theoretical primacy to emotive performance through studying embodied practices (Kidder 2009; Wacquant 2004). Implicit within the notion of embodied practice is emotional experience (Denzin 1984). Embodiment is sometimes treated as essentially nonreflexive. However, as we will show, the public *performance* of emotion can be highly reflexive too. Our theory can be used by ethnographers who want to grasp the full extent to which urban environments mediate affective meanings by allowing (or disallowing) certain cultural frames for emotional displays.

Even in areas of sociology that are traditionally considered as dominated by institutional structures and rules, sociologists are beginning to uncover the relevance of emotion. In economic sociology, more sociologists are now showing interests in the hitherto overlooked role of emotion (for an overview, see Berezin 2009). Here, our concept of emotive performance can be utilized to uncover how economically relevant anticipatory emotions (Kemper 1978), such as optimism and pessimism, are made *real* in the acts of supposedly “cold” emotive performance, through technical analyses, presentations of statistics and forecasts, and above all, narratives that invoke fear or hope (case in point, how the 2008 financial crisis was portrayed as the second coming of the Great Depression).

In sociological studies of law, another rules-dominated social institution, scholars are paying more attention to how litigants, lawyers, and judges are involved in performing emotions in the courtroom (Bandes 2000; Ng 2009; Polletta 2001). Polletta (2001) argues that legal decisionmakers are skilled in emotive performance. They selectively display sympathy, disdain, irritation, and humor to process cases expeditiously through their courts. Their performances reflect their normative evaluations of the people whose cases they are processing. Ng (2009) describes how emotionally stirring performances given by Cantonese-speaking litigants are often taken as “crazy” and “off-the-wall” by the legal professionals in Hong Kong. Yet, emotions can be performatively mobilized by these litigants to disrupt the formalistic

procedures of the law. We build on these contributions by laying out this theoretical underpinning of emotional performance, focusing on performance as reflexive, cultural, and communicative.

THEORY

The term “emotion,” like many other terms in the social sciences, is one term that people use every day but for which researchers find it hard to agree upon a common definition (cf. Mandler 1984; see also Kemper 1987). Among cognitive psychologists, the most influential and widely discussed theory that defines emotion behaviorally is Paul Ekman’s attempt to link emotions with cross-culturally similar facial expressions (happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, and disgust) (Ekman 1972, 1993; Ekman and Rosenberg 1995). Cognitive psychologists have debated the validity of a basic spectrum of emotions tied to biological reactions (cf. Ortony and Turner 1990). It is not our intention to get into the debate here. But we think among sociologists who study emotion, it is agreed upon by all hands that emotion is a physical emanation (Clark 1993; Harré 1986; Hochschild 1979, 1998; Katz 1999; Scheff 1990; Thoits 1989), if only among other things. And it is of course the *other things* that most interest sociologists. When someone *acts* emotionally, there are identifiable physiological changes such as distinct changes in facial expressions, heart palpitations, rapid breathing, tear-duct secretions, and hormone levels. The way we differ from authors who take a biological approach toward understanding emotion is that we disagree that all questions of emotion can ultimately be reduced to its biological components. For example, an evolutionary biologist may claim the ultimate explanation for the human act of crying lies in the fact that humans evolved from aquatic apes. Supposedly, our tear duct secretions (not unlike the nose secretions of sea birds or eye secretions of sea crocodiles) help to rid the body of imbalanced biochemicals produced during emotional states (McNaughton 1989:146–48). But for those of us interested in studying emotion as a social phenomenon, to see emotion purely in terms of physiological changes is like describing a sociological classic, say Karl Marx’s *Capital* or Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, only in terms of its physical dimensions (7.8 × 5.1 × 2.1 inches and 8.2 × 5.1 × 0.8 inches, respectively, in their most popular editions). The description is obviously correct but leaves unsaid what made the book a classic in the first place.

Emotive Performance as Reflexive

In a most formal sense, emotive performance is by definition reflexive, that is, the performance is performed by the very person it is about. But as a theoretical concept, what is reflexivity? The concept is a tangle of confusions; different authors use it to mean different things, from an essential human capacity to a system property (cf. Lynch 2000). For our purpose, we go back to the writings of George Herbert Mead. Reflexivity is referred by Mead as “the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself” (1934:134). In the context of emotive performance, we appropriate the term to highlight the fact that a person remains accessible to herself in her emotional experience of herself. Specifically, reflexivity is manifested in one’s ability to refer to and comment on her own emotion—one shows emotion by showing *why* one is emotional. As Solomon (1976:416) writes, “reflection is not a detached and foreign commentary merely ‘about’ our emotions; reflection

transforms them.” While cold calculation is often foregone in the spontaneous display of emotion, it does not mean that the process itself is nonreflexive. There remains a reflexive component, or to use a Meadian term, a “me” component in the doing of emotion, in the sense that “the ‘me’ is the response which the individual makes to the other individuals in so far as the individual takes the attitude of the other” (Mead 1934:280). So understood, to say that emotion is performative means that the actors display for others, and in fact also to themselves, the meaning of their emotion in the process of expressing it (Alexander 2006). Performatively speaking, that reflexive commenting does not come *after* an emotional outburst; instead, it is through the very act of reflexive commenting that distinct emotions (in our case, anger) are articulated and named (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990:11–12; Rosenberg 1990:8).

The centrality of reflexivity means that emotion is not the mere expression of an “internally” preformed instinctual content into an “externally” perceptible form (think the common phrase “*outpouring* of emotion”). Instead, we take a more constructivist view of the formation of emotion—the *doing* of emotion is an interactive performance that constantly shapes, develops, and alters the meanings of the emotion expressed. Our emphasis on the processual, emergent nature of emotive performance aims to shed light on the liminal space between intentionality and unintentionality—actors are not un-minded and are aware of their circumstances, but consciousness is at work to define the cultural horizon of background knowledge rather than to engage in deliberate calculation or even manipulation. That space, as Alexander (2006) puts it, is a space that lies between “ritual” and “strategy.” Emotive performance derives from the command of some background cultural knowledge, or what Goffman calls “a command of an idiom, a command that is exercised from moment to moment with little calculation or forethought” (1959:74).

Emotive Performance as Cultural

The persisting presence of the “me” component in emotive performance means that performativity goes beyond the exercise of the lone subject reflecting on the subject itself. Cultural meaning is implicated in one’s performance of emotion. The emotive self is on display in the course of social interactions. Actors not only display emotion through their bodily manifestations; they also perform emotion through narratives that are meant to be judged as valid articulations of the issue at stake. Seldom does a person resort to meaningless rants (the person might regret what he said, but saying something regretful is different from saying something meaningless) at the height of a so-called emotional outburst. Hence, a key feature of emotion is its realization in narrative and “situated rhetoric” (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990; Edwards 1997; Watson-Gegeo and White 1990). Narrating one’s emotion is a way to bring about culturally specific intuitions and senses about emotion. Its felicity turns on historically contingent cultural resources.

As we will see, in the two episodes we discuss below, the actors offer a detailed account for the “causes” of their emotions. Emotive performance hence involves explicitly answering the question of “why?” in the narrative form. A person who *performs* emotion, then, is also the interlocutor who answers the questions his performance creates. In other words, emotive performance often involves the staking out of strong evaluation, not so much in the specific sense that Taylor (1989) uses it (evaluation that concerns questions about what kind of life is worth living), but in the broader sense that of evaluation or judgment that involves intrinsic, end-in-itself

values, an evaluation that can in turn become the basis for moral appraisal on the part of the audience. Our performative theory takes as its starting point the view that in emotional states we recognize and reveal values that we normally do not posit deliberately. We argue that it is this staking out of intrinsic values that often makes a person in the thick of emotional display resistant to persuasion by contrary argument.¹

In addition, emotive performance often features a process of reframing through the use of narrative, that is, describing “what happens” as a particular instance of something else (Averill 1982; Goffman 1974; Hochschild 1979; Solomon 1976), and sometimes it involves redefinition of the whole situation (Heise 1979; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988). Behind every actor’s social performance lies the already established skein of narratives and rhetorics that represent culture in action (Alexander 2006:58). Narrative situates what would have been otherwise interpreted as an abrupt eruption of emotion in an unfolding of events that render the emotion justifiable. In so doing, actors transform the relationship between characters in a social scene through the recasting of events in a different light.

Emotive Performance as Communicative

Emotions, particularly those of the more dramatic sort, come into being as one interacts with other people. When ordinary language philosopher J. L. Austin (1962) used the word “performative” to describe the use of language, he was referring precisely to the fact that words do not simply describe, but in fact people use language to shape and alter reality. There is a communicative and pragmatic aspect to emotive performance that sociologists can hardly afford to ignore. Like other social performances, emotive performance is directed toward other people in the world and is not locked up in some cabinet of private consciousness. Through the use of narrative, as well as expressive devices such as a well-turned phrase, a tone of voice, a look of the eyes, or a posture, actors impress others in a certain way (Goffman 1959:2). It intervenes by trying to swing people’s perception of the display in one way or another. In other words, emotive performance involves the communication of claims, which, if effective, both inform and constrain the reactions of an audience (Bailey 1983:59). These claims are communicative ventures, ways of trying felicitous rhetoric to allow one to occupy the narrative high ground that have been claimed through these forays.²

In the case of the emotion that we discuss, anger, it is an emotion with a clear target—when we are angry, we are always angry with people or angry at something (Averill 1980). It is also a “power” emotion, as opposed to fear, which comes from a lack of power (Barbalet 1998). Psychologists who study group dynamics have found that subordinate members of a social group are more likely to respond to a violation with “sadness” than with “anger” (Hess and Kirouac 2000:370). Emotions and emotional expression thus have a role in (re)producing relations of power, and in defining or asserting the social identities and relations from which people speak and feel.

¹Again, it is important to distinguish the position that takes emotion as thoughtless and the position that suggests emotion can seal off one’s thought from the challenge of an alternative argument (see Bailey 1983:29–41).

²We thank one of the reviewers for reminding us of the communicative nature of emotions.

To sum up, a performative approach takes serious the social settings in which emotion is expressed and communicated. When people publicly perform a dramatic emotion, such as anger or happiness, they continually “update” their performance (and hence their emotions) *in real time* by taking the reactions of other people constantly into account. Thus, to study emotive performance means a more contextualized approach to emotion, an approach that pays attention to the “interactional regime” in which emotive performance occurs (Clark 1987). Approaching emotion this way allows us to study emotion as a bona fide sociological phenomenon—it shifts the focus from what *is* emotion to what emotion *does* to alter or reproduce social relations.

HOW JIANG AND CLINTON DO ANGER

We illustrate our performative approach by analyzing two well-known episodes drawn from China and the United States. Both episodes were widely reported in the media. The first episode took place during a media session held between then Chinese President Jiang Zemin and a group of reporters from Hong Kong in 2001. The second one is former President Bill Clinton’s interview by *Fox News Sunday* host Chris Wallace in 2006. Together they provide two interesting cases to see how performativity can be identified in the public display of emotion.

Both cases were unrehearsed and spontaneous. Doing emotion in rehearsed “pseudoevents” (Boorstin 1992) is a different game, one outside the focus of this article. Spontaneous displays of emotion are particularly appealing because they allow us to get at some of the more deeply ingrained cultural plots and narratives available at people’s fingertips. We focus on *unrehearsed* emotive performances when actors justify their emotions on their feet, or in the hot seat, without much forethought.

The same emotion, or at least the same or similar emotional label, is featured in the two episodes we study. Both Clinton and Jiang indicate that they are angry (Jiang says: “I’m angry!”; Clinton acknowledges that he is “on a tear”). We are here not primarily concerned with how cultural vocabularies shape the labeling of emotions, a fruitful research agenda in and of itself (cf. Lindholm 2005; Shott 1979). Rather, we examine how culturally specific narratives performatively give shape to the emotion named.

The data we use are transcripts made from the video footage of the episodes. For the Clinton interview, our transcripts are based on the DVD footage of the original unedited televised interview.³ For the Jiang interview, our English transcripts are based on the VCD footage of a Chinese news program broadcast in Hong Kong in 2000 that replayed the whole episode.⁴ We reproduce almost the complete transcript of Jiang’s interview in this article. The Clinton interview is longer. In the interest of space, we reproduce only the most relevant parts. Although we pay attention to paralinguistic signs such as tone, body gestures, and hand movements, our focus is mainly on how emotion is narrated. Given the nature of our inquiry, we use no special notational system for our transcripts.

³We purchased a DVD of the Clinton interview from Voxant’s New Media Network, of which Fox News is one of over 200 licensed content affiliates.

⁴The program, known as *Xin wen tou shi*, is a weekly program produced and broadcasted by Television Broadcasting Limited of Hong Kong. The episode on Jiang, titled “Jiang zong long yan da nu,” was originally broadcast on October 28, 2000. We retrieved the VCD of that episode from the audio-video collection of the Main Library at the University of Hong Kong. Interested readers can access both Jiang’s and Clinton’s footages at <http://www.niu.edu/~jkidder/EP.Site/EP.Home.html>.

JIANG: "TOO YOUNG. TOO SIMPLE. SOMETIMES NAÏVE."

Our first case involves a rare episode in which a top Chinese political leader, then China's President Jiang Zemin, displayed his anger before the media—he lashed out at a group of Hong Kong reporters, describing them as "too simple, sometimes naive." On October 27, 2000, Mr. Jiang held a photo-call session with a group of reporters from Hong Kong after his meeting with the embattled Mr. Tung Chee-hwa, then Chief Executive of Hong Kong. The meeting took place in Beijing's *Zhongnanhai*, the headquarters of the Central Government in China. In terms of setting, the event was an opportunity for the press not just to take photographs but also to ask a few questions. Neither Jiang nor Tung made an opening statement to set the agenda. Neither was it a one-on-one interview, as a group of Hong Kong reporters was present during the session. But as we will see, the conditions of interaction during the photo-call session in many ways resemble those of a news interview. It features a question-and-answer format that is guided by similar institutional norms and practices.

Mr. Tung was not a popular chief executive. He later resigned in 2005, citing "health reasons." The property market bubble had recently burst, and Hong Kong was experiencing a sharp economic downturn. Mr. Tung, however, was the man whom the Central Government of China had endorsed to lead Hong Kong when the colonial period ended in 1997. At the time of the episode, Tung had one year remaining in his first term as chief executive. The Hong Kong media was eager to find out from President Jiang if the Central Government of China would offer its blessing for Tung to serve a second term. During the episode, Jiang took exception to a question raised by a Hong Kong reporter, who asked if his support prior to the election amounted to an "imperial appointment." Jiang was visibly enraged. He, however, was speaking to Hong Kong reporters, educated in Hong Kong or overseas and who, as a group, shared the "watchdog" ideal of the Western press, a point that Jiang himself was aware of and in fact acknowledged in the episode ("You are very familiar with the Western set of *value*." Line 20 in the transcript, see below).

Jiang spoke in *Putonghua* most of the time, but he also threw in some English and Cantonese words at crucial junctures to achieve a heightened sense of performativity.⁵ For their part, the reporters raised all questions in *Putonghua*. The event was widely reported on television and in the newspapers of Hong Kong. It was even rare enough to draw the attention of major international news publications (including *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, and *The Guardian*, among others). For a long while, the phrase "too simple, sometimes naïve" was a staple of banter among the people of Hong Kong.⁶

We begin at a point when the scheduled photo-call is coming to an end. Up to this point, the session precedes uneventfully, much in the same way as most other media sessions in China. Jiang is sitting comfortably in a sofa chair, with Mr. Tung and two other senior Chinese officials sitting next to him. Then, Jiang is asked if he

⁵*Putonghua*, or Mandarin, is the official language of People's Republic of China. Cantonese is the vernacular spoken by most people in Hong Kong.

⁶Even though the incident was widely reported, media reports together did not present a coherent reading of the event. They undermined their own account with internal inconsistencies. On the one hand, Jiang was portrayed by some media as losing his temper (e.g., Gittings 2000; Kong and Cheung 2000). On the other hand, journalists also tried to look for the motives behind his harangue, with possible curbing of the press freedom in Hong Kong a major concern (Landler 2000). The question for us is, how could a man who "loses it" at the same time carry out a maneuver to promote hidden causes? The same inconsistency can be found in some of the accounts of the Clinton episode we examine.

supports Mr. Tung to serve a second term as the top man of Hong Kong (Line 1). Jiang answers in the affirmative (Line 2). After that, Sharon Cheung, a TV news reporter from Cable Television Hong Kong, follows up and asks the key question that apparently triggers Jiang's extraordinary performance.⁷ She asks if his early support of Tung would amount to an "imperial appointment" (Line 13):

- 1 Reporter: Chairman Jiang, do you think it is good for Mr. Tung to serve another term?
- 2 Jiang: *It's good* [in Cantonese].
- 3 R: Do the Central also support him?
- 4 J: Of course!
- 5 R: Why do you say this so early? Are there other candidates or not?
- 6 J: I don't have time to talk to you all.
- 7 R: [addressing Tung] Mr. Tung, will you stand to compete for a second term? The Central so support you.
- 8 Tung: I'll talk to you later, OK?
- 9 R: The European Union recently published a report, there it said Beijing would influence, intervene in the rule of law in Hong Kong through some channels...
- 10 J: I haven't heard of this.
- 11 R: It was mentioned by Chris Patten.
- 12 J: You journalists should pay attention, don't take the wind for the rain. Do you see what I'm saying? See what I'm saying? When you receive some information, I believe as a journalist you have to make a judgment. For things that are unnecessary, why would you want to help out the person by repeating it one more time? You have responsibility, don't you know?
- 13 R: Now is such an early time. You all said you supported Mr. Tung. Will that give people the impression that there is already an internal decision or imperial appointment on Mr. Tung?
- 14 J: There's no such implication whatsoever. Everything should be done in accordance with Hong Kong... according to the Basic Law, the election laws.
- 15 R: But...
- [Jiang stands up and moves a few steps forward toward the reporters]
- 16 J: What you've just asked me, I could have said "No comment." But you guys wouldn't be happy. So what should I do? [palms wide open]

Upon hearing the question, Jiang attempts briefly to offer a standard answer—everything has to be done according to the election laws. But soon he stops himself from toeing the standard line; he then stands up, leaves his seat, and walks toward the reporters (after Line 15). Jiang contests the interpretation embedded in the question the reporter put forward to him—that his support of Tung one year before the election of the chief executive of Hong Kong amounted to an "imperial appointment." For a communist leader who governs a country with thousands of years of imperial history, the question hits a sensitive spot.

⁷As a result of this particular episode, Sharon Cheung has now become a household name in Hong Kong.

As we will see, as with Clinton in the Wallace interview, Jiang presents himself as a victim of a reporter's bait-and-switch. Jiang starts first by complaining that his goodwill is not appreciated but abused—"I could have said 'No comment'. But you guys wouldn't be happy. So what should I do?" (Line 16). He then goes on the offensive:

17 R: Then . . .

18 J: What I said does not mean I imperially appoint him to serve the next term [pointing at Tung]. You asked me whether I support him or not, I support. I can tell you clearly.

19 R: President Jiang . . .

20 J: [Interrupting] [walking closer toward the crowd of reporters and waving his hands] You all! My feeling is that you the media need to learn more. You are very familiar with the Western set of *value* [in English], but after all you are *too young* [in English] [pointing at the reporters], do you understand what I mean? Let me tell you, I've been through hundreds of battles. I've seen it all. Which country in the West have I not been to? Every time . . . You should know, Mike Wallace in the United States, he's way above you all [gesturing with both hands to show a "two thumbs up"]. He and I talked and laughed comfortably. Which is why the media need to raise your level of knowledge. *Got it or not* [in Cantonese]? [briefly turns his back, but then immediately turns back to face the reporter again]

21 J: [sigh] I'm anxious for you all! It's true. You really . . . I . . . You guys are good at one thing. All over the world wherever you go to, you always run faster than Western journalists. But the questions you keep asking—*too simple, sometimes naïve* [in English]! Understand or not? *Got it or not?* [in Cantonese]

[Several reporters try to follow up on his answers. Jiang walks back to his seat, but turns back after a few steps and walks toward the reporters again]

22 J: I'm very sorry. Today I am speaking to you as an elder, not as a journalist. I am not a journalist (his right hand on his chest). But I've seen too much [waving his hand]. I have this necessity to tell you a bit of my life experience.

Jiang's plea to the reporters that they should "raise their level of knowledge" certainly rings a bell for anyone familiar with the Chinese communist propaganda. It is a sloganized saying common among the speeches of many of the early communist leaders. What is interesting is that Jiang's performance of anger is anchored in a hierarchy that comes out of quite a different cultural background, of a society that still has traditional respect for the aged. Jiang's choice of the Chinese words for the term "elderly" is instrumental (Line 22). Jiang uses the term "*zhangzhe*." The term, much like the English word "elder," means not just someone who was born earlier but who is also higher up in the seniority ladder. But different from the English word, the Chinese word *zhang* has additional meanings beyond seniority. *Zhang* is a word people also use to mean "tall" or "good at," so that a person who is old (in age) is also seen as tall (in status) and good at life. The hierarchy is explicitly invoked when Jiang himself brings his "elderly" identity to the front and center: "I'm speaking to you today as an elder (*zhangzhe*)," "I am not a journalist but I've seen too much."

In so doing, Jiang couched his performance in the narrative of an elder sharing his life experience with a group of young people. In fact, the episode nicely illustrates the two-way relationship between narrative and performance—a valid performance draws on available narrative plots but also reproduces and exhibits the narrative, a point well discussed by others in the context of probing the “dual” nature of structure (cf. Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1979; Sewell 1992).

Specifically, we identify three different aspects through which the narrative framework of elderly talk allows Jiang’s performance to follow a distinctive pattern that is locally intelligible. First, it is used to formulate a culturally ordered causality to justify his remark on the naivety of the reporters—Jiang uses the phrase “you are too young” to preface his comments of “too simple,” “sometimes naïve” (Line 21). Performatively, “too young” is indexically connected to “too simple” and “naïve.” Second, Jiang draws upon the “elderly talk” narrative again to construct a knowledge hierarchy that puts him on top (Jiang is already on top in terms of power and status, but performing power convincingly requires good justification *in situ*). Jiang juxtaposes himself with and contrasts himself to the Hong Kong reporters who are “too young” and “too simple.” He is an elder, “who has been through hundreds of battles,” and who has “seen it all” (Line 20).

Third, the narrative further establishes, performatively, a culturally informed criterion for authority. That Jiang cites Mike Wallace, a veteran reporter both in terms of his experience and his age, is anything but a coincidence (Line 20). The iconic Mr. Wallace, already an octogenarian (and eight years more senior than Jiang) at the time when the episode took place, is a logical choice for Jiang. Jiang says Wallace is “way above you all” and yet he (Jiang) “chatted and laughed with him (Wallace) comfortably.” The “elderly talk” narrative not just anchors Jiang’s emotive performance, but also transforms the relation between him and the audience from that of a public relation between a politician and his reporters to a culturally typical relation of an old man and a group of inexperienced, overzealous youngsters (by the Chinese standard). So understood, using Mike Wallace as the yardstick is an ever so quiet performative sleight of hand—Mike Wallace is way above you and he is much older than you; Mike Wallace is way above you *because* he is much older than you *and* so am I.

- 23 R: But could you say why you support Tung Chee-hwa?
[Jiang walks back. He gets to his seat this time but then turns his back again and walks back to where he was a few seconds ago]
- 24 J: You...I’m really anxious. A moment ago. A moment ago I really wanted... Every time I run into all of you, in Chinese we have a saying: “Say nothing and you’ll make a fortune.” If I had said nothing, that would have been the best. But I thought I’ve seen all of you so enthusiastic. If I said nothing, that wouldn’t be good. So a moment ago you just insisted. In spreading the news, if your reports are inaccurate, you have to be responsible. I did not say giving an imperial appointment. No such meaning whatsoever. But you insisted on asking me whether I supported Mr. Tung or not. He is still the current Chief Executive, how could we not support the Chief Executive?
- 25 R: But if we talk about his serving another term...
- 26 J: [Interrupting] To serve another term, you have to follow the laws of Hong Kong. Right? Of course, our right to make the decision is also very important [jabbing his finger for emphasis], since the Hong Kong SAR belongs to the Central Government of the People’s Republic of

China. When it gets to the right time, we will let you know our position. Understand what I say? You all [reporters try to interject but Jiang continues]. Don't provoke an uproar (waiving his hand in circle). Don't say it's a big piece of news, say "It has already been imperially appointed" and criticize me [pointing his finger at his nose]. You all! [reporters try to interject again] *Naïve!* [in English] (pointing with both hands at the reporters)

[Jiang turns his back to the reporters and start walking away]

- 27 J: *Naïve!* [in English] [saying it loud as he walks away] *I am angry!* [in English] It isn't right for all of you to act like this. I have to offend you a bit today.

Ignoring reporters' attempts to follow up on the same question, Jiang tells them that he was doing himself a disfavor when he chose to answer their questions (Line 24). He says he was trying not to disappoint all the enthusiastic reporters from Hong Kong. He further adds a contextual particular to dispute the claim that what he said amounts to an imperial order—Mr. Tung is the incumbent and it is basic courtesy for someone in his position to support the incumbent chief executive of Hong Kong. When reporters appear undaunted and insist on raising the question again, Jiang this time makes explicit that the reporters should not say in their reports that the next chief executive has already been imperially appointed and that they should not criticize him for that. He utters the word "naïve" loudly again (Line 27). And this time he gesticulates even more emphatically by pushing his hand forward and pointing his fingers toward the crowd of reporters, as if he was throwing the word "naïve" right at them. His face convulses in ways rarely seen in public, if at all, before. Finally, he caps his performance by shouting loudly what he has already acted out: "I am angry" (Line 27).

CLINTON: "I AM UPSET BECAUSE..."

Our second case comes from an interview of Bill Clinton. In September 2006, Bill Clinton sat down to do his first interview ever on the Fox News Channel. He was interviewed by Chris Wallace for the program *Fox News Sunday*.⁸ The interview was scheduled as part of a public relations campaign for the second annual meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative (which convenes in conjunction with the U.N. General Assembly). It was set up as a simple one-on-one interview. The news interview is a familiar and recognizable genre of broadcast interaction (Clayman 2004). Historically, its growing significance in American journalism coincided with the professionalization of the industry (Schudson 1978). It is a highly structured game, and in the game all parties almost always consent to the rules of question and answer turn-taking (Clayman and Heritage 2002).⁹ As it turned out, the interview quickly became a confrontation when Wallace asked if Clinton failed to do enough to prevent the 9/11 attack. The complete interview was broadcast unedited.

Fox News Channel is the most successful American news network by audience size. It is also often accused of having a conservative bent. Some research finds that when compared to other television news outlets, Fox is more likely to use information

⁸Chris Wallace is the son of Mike Wallace, who interviewed Jiang.

⁹Sociologists interested in face-to-face interaction have identified interviews that went wrong as memorable interactional events such as, Dan Rather's famously confrontational "interview" with then Vice President George H. W. Bush (cf. Clayman and Whalen 1988/1989; Schegloff 1992).

contributed by conservative think tanks (Groseclose and Mayo 2005). Furthermore, conservatives comprise the largest segment of the network's viewers (Pew Research Center 2004): a total of 35 percent of Fox's audience is Republican (compared to just 19 percent for CNN). This is a fact that Clinton is well aware of and even alludes to during his exchange with Wallace.¹⁰

Wallace starts his first question with a quote by Clinton himself from an article in *The New Yorker* (Remnick 2006): "I'm 60 years old and I damn near died, and I'm worried about how many lives I can save before I do die." Wallace then asks if this is what drives Clinton in his effort to help in developing countries. Clinton clarifies and tells Wallace that the way Wallace recited his quotes makes him sound "morbid," but in fact he was trying to be whimsical. Clinton sits back in a chair; his demeanor is relaxed and friendly, flashing his warm, enamoring smile as he answers Wallace's question. Wallace's demeanor is courtly—he approaches Clinton politely, but maintains a professional distance. In talking to Wallace, Clinton appears to frankly admit to the vulnerability of life. He remains apparently laid back, relaxing into his chair as he answers Wallace's questions.

The interview continues in an amicable tone for close to three minutes. Clinton explains how he can still facilitate positive social change in his capacity as a former president. The "frame-breaking" moment, however, comes abruptly when the following question is put to Clinton:

- 1 Wallace: When we announced that you were going to be on *Fox News Sunday*, I got a lot of e-mail from viewers. And I've got to say, I was surprised. Most of them wanted me to ask you this question: Why didn't you do more to put bin Laden and Al Qaeda out of business when you were president? There's a new book out, I suspect you've already read, called *The Looming Tower*, and it talks about how the fact that when you pulled troops out of Somalia in 1993, bin Laden said, "I have seen the frailty and the weakness and the cowardice of U.S. troops." Then there was the bombing of the embassies in Africa and the attack on the Cole.
- 2 Clinton: [Sits up and leans forward toward Wallace] OK, let's just go through that.
- 3 W: [Interrupting] Let me—let me—may I just finish the question, sir? And after the attack, the book says that bin Laden separated his leaders, spread them around, because he expected an attack, and there was no response. I understand that hindsight is always twenty-twenty.
- 4 C: No, let's talk about it.
- 5 W: But the question is, why didn't you do more, connect the dots and put them out of business?
[Clinton leans forward]

¹⁰Clinton's performance was much debated by political pundits in the United States (cf. McNamara 2006). While some saw it as "calculated effort" (Lambro 2006), many more saw the episode as a "melt-down." *The New York Times* referred to the episode as the ignition of "simmering Democratic and Clintonian anger" (Manly 2006:4:1). *The Washington Post* claimed that "Clinton exploded" (Dionne 2006:A21), and more conservative outlets labeled the event even more colorfully as a "theatrical temper-tantrum" (Lambro 2006:A12) and "Bill Clinton's Tom Cruise moment" (Lopez 2006). Chris Wallace himself would later state: "Former President Clinton is a very big man. As he leaned forward, wagging his finger in my face—and then poking the notes I was holding—I felt as if a mountain was coming down in front of me" (Fishbowl D.C. 2006).

- 6 C: OK, let's talk about it. Now, I will answer all those things on the merits, but first I want to talk about the context in which this arises. I'm being asked this on the Fox Network. ABC just had a right-wing conservative run in their little "Pathway to 9/11," falsely claiming it was based on the 9/11 Commission report, with three things asserted against me directly contradicted by the 9/11 Commission report. And, I think it's very interesting that all the conservative Republicans, who now say I didn't do enough, claimed that I was too obsessed with bin Laden. All of President Bush's neo-cons thought I was too obsessed with bin Laden. They had no meetings on bin Laden for nine months after I left office. All the right-wingers who now say I didn't do enough said I did too much—same people. They were all trying to get me to withdraw from Somalia in 1993 the next day after we were involved in Black Hawk Down, and I refused to do it and stayed six months and had an orderly transfer to the United Nations. OK, now let's look at all the criticisms: Black Hawk Down, Somalia. There is not a living soul in the world who thought that Osama bin Laden had anything to do with Black Hawk Down or was paying any attention to it or even knew Al Qaeda was a going concern in October of '93.
- 7 W: I understand, and I...
- 8 C: [Interrupting] No, wait. No, wait. Don't tell me this—you asked me why didn't I do more to bin Laden. There was not a living soul. All the people who now criticize me wanted to leave the next day. You brought this up, so you'll get an answer, but you can't...
- 9 W: [Interrupting] I'm perfectly happy to.
- 10 C: [Over-talk] All right, secondly...
- 11 W: [Over-talk] Bin Laden says...
- 12 C: [Over-talk] Bin Laden may have said...
- 13 W: ...bin Laden says that it showed the weakness of the United States.
- 14 C: But it would've shown the weakness if we'd left right away, but he wasn't involved in that. That's just a bunch of bull. That was about Mohammed Adid, a Muslim warlord, murdering 22 Pakistani Muslim troops. We were all there on a humanitarian mission. We had no mission, none, to establish a certain kind of Somali government or to keep anybody out. He was not a religious fanatic...
- 15 W: [Interrupting] But, Mr. President...
- 16 C: [Over-talk]... there was no Al Qaeda...
- 17 W: [Interrupting]...with respect, if I may, instead of going through '93 and...
[Clinton shifts forcefully back in his seat and then moves forward, very close to Wallace]
- 18 C: [Interrupting] No, no. You asked it. You brought it up. You brought it up...

Wallace is apparently aware that the question he's asked is different from what he has already asked at this point of the interview. He tries to attenuate its aggressiveness by prefacing it as a question of "others." Speaking on behalf of his viewers, Wallace says a lot of them wanted him to ask what comes next (and he was surprised!). His effort to minimize the explosiveness of the question is, in hindsight, unsuccessful. The moment the question is raised, Clinton reads the whole situation in an entirely

different light, so much so that it is for him no longer an interview. Clinton in fact tells us how he reframes the developing situation by explicating the leaps of association through which he contextualizes where he is: “I’m being asked this on the Fox Network. ABC just had a right-wing conservative run in their little *Pathway to 9/11*, falsely claiming it was based on the 9/11 Commission report, with three things asserted against me directly contradicted by the 9/11 Commission report” (Line 6). For Clinton, the fact that the question is raised *here* and *now* is proof enough that the interview is not an interview, but another attack by his political opponents. Structurally, it is also at this point that the turn-taking order begins to break apart (interruptions and over-talks).

Right after hearing the question from Wallace, Clinton sits up and leans forward toward Wallace: “OK, let’s just go through that” (Line 2). When Wallace again tries to mitigate the perceived hostility of the question by invoking the journalistic cliché, “I understand that hindsight is always 20/20” (Line 3), Clinton tells him to spare the effort by saying: “No, let’s talk about it” (Line 4). It is clear from Clinton’s response that he sees the impending one-on-one combat as inevitable.

Clinton is asked why he did not do more to put bin Laden and Al Qaeda out of business while he was president. Clinton’s response in short is that what he did has to be viewed in its historical context (Line 14). He says back then he was the one who most wanted to kill bin Laden. When Wallace tries to break up his long answer (Lines 15 and 17), Clinton insists on his right to finish answering a question put to him. (“You brought this up, so you’ll get an answer.”) At this point, Clinton acts more like a combative witness being cross-examined hostilely by an opposing counsel than a celebrity politician in a news interview. He fights for every turn he is entitled to hold as a witness—“You brought this up. So you’ll get an answer.”

- 19 W: [Interrupting] May I ask a general question and then you can answer?
 20 C: Yes.
 21 W: The 9/11 Commission, which you’ve talk about—and this is what they did say, not what ABC pretended they said . . .
 22 C: [Over-talk] What did they say?
 23 W: . . .they said about you and President Bush, and I quote, “The U.S. government took the threat seriously, but not in the sense of mustering anything like the kind of effort that would be gathered to confront an enemy of the first, second or even third rank.”
 24 C: First of all, that’s not true with us and bin Laden.
 25 W: Well, I’m telling you that’s what the 9/11 Commission says.
 [Clinton leans forward]
 26 C: [Over-talk] Let’s look at what Richard Clarke said. Do you think Richard Clarke has a vigorous attitude about bin Laden?
 27 W: Yes, I do . . .
 28 C: [Over-talk] You do, don’t you?
 27 W: I think he has a variety of opinions and loyalties, but yes, he has a vigorous opinion . . .
 30 C: He has a variety of opinion and loyalties now, but let’s look at the facts. He worked for Ronald Reagan; he was loyal to him. He worked for George H. W. Bush; he was loyal to him. He worked for me, and he was loyal to me. He worked for President Bush; he was loyal to him. They downgraded him and the terrorist operation. Now, look what he said,

read his book and read his factual assertions—not opinions—assertions. He said we took vigorous action after the African embassies. We probably nearly got bin Laden.

- 31 W: [Interrupting] But...
- 32 C: [Over-talk] No, wait a minute.
- 33 W: [Over-talk]... cruise missiles.
- 34 C: No, no. I authorized the CIA to get groups together to try to kill him. The CIA, which was run by George Tenet, that President Bush gave the Medal of Freedom to, he said he did a good job setting up all these counterterrorism things. The country never had a comprehensive antiterror operation until I came there. Now, if you want to criticize me for one thing, you can criticize me for this: After the Cole, I had battle plans drawn to go into Afghanistan, overthrow the Taliban, and launch a full-scale attack search for bin Laden. But, we needed basing rights in Uzbekistan, which we got after 9/11. The CIA and the FBI refused to certify that bin Laden was responsible while I was there. They refused to certify. So that meant I would've had to send a few hundred Special Forces in helicopters and refuel at night. Even the 9/11 Commission didn't do that. Now, the 9/11 Commission was a political document, too. All I'm asking is, anybody who wants to say I didn't do enough, you read Richard Clarke's book...
- 35 W: [Interrupting] Do you think you did enough, sir?
- 36 C: No, because I didn't get him.
- 37 W: Right.
- 38 C: But at least I tried. [Pointing his finger for emphasis] That's the difference in me and some, including all the right-wingers who are attacking me now. They ridiculed me for trying. They had eight months to try. They did not try. I tried. So I tried and failed. When I failed, I left a comprehensive antiterror strategy and the best guy in the country, Dick Clarke, who got demoted. So you did Fox's bidding on this show. You did your nice little conservative hit job on me. What I want to know is...
- 39 W: [Interrupting] Well, wait a minute, sir.
- 40 C: [Over-talk] No, wait. No, no...
- 41 W: [Over-talk] I want to ask a question. You don't think that's a legitimate question?
[Clinton leans forward and repeatedly taps Wallace's question sheet for emphasis]
- 42 C: It was a perfectly legitimate question, but I want to know how many people in the Bush administration you asked this question of. I want to know how many people in the Bush administration you asked, "Why didn't you do anything about the Cole?" I want to know how many you asked, "Why did you fire Dick Clarke?" I want to know how many people you asked...
- 43 W: [Interrupting] We asked—we asked...
- 44 C: [Over-talk] I don't...
- 45 W: Do you ever watch *Fox News Sunday*, sir?
- 46 C: I don't believe you asked them that.
- 47 W: We ask plenty of questions of...
- 48 C: [Interrupting] You didn't ask that, did you? Tell the truth, Chris.
- 49 W: [Over-talk] About the USS Cole?

- 50 C: [Over-talk] Tell the truth, Chris.
- 51 W: [Over-talk] With Iraq and Afghanistan, there's plenty of stuff to ask.
- 52 C: [Over-talk] Did you ever ask that? You set this meeting up because you were going to get a lot of criticism from your viewers because Rupert Murdoch's supporting my work on climate change. And you came here under false pretenses and said that you'd spend half the time talking about—you said you'd spend half the time talking about what we did out there to raise \$7-billion-plus in three days from 215 different commitments. And you don't care...
- 53 W: [Interrupting] But, President Clinton, if you look at the questions here, you'll see half the questions are about that. I didn't think this was going to set you off on such a tear.
- 54 C: [Interrupting] You launched it—it set off on a tear because you didn't formulate it in an honest way and because you people ask me questions you don't ask the other side.
- 55 W: [Over-talk] That's not true. Sir, that is not true.

In this segment, Wallace quotes the 9/11 Commission to suggest a failure on the part of Clinton to promptly address the potential threat of bin Laden (Line 23); Clinton counters by referring to the insider's account of Richard Clarke, who served as the chief counterterrorism adviser on the U.S. National Security Council during Clinton's presidency (Lines 26 and 30). Clinton defends himself by recounting what he did during his presidency on counterterrorism. He offers evidence to support his claim that he made serious attempts to get bin Laden. Wallace does not really debate with Clinton on the accuracy of his historical account; instead, after a round of exchange, he puts this to Clinton: "Do you think you did enough, sir?" (Line 35). The question itself is neutral in form; it is not leading in the sense that it does not imply a particular preferred answer (either "yes" or "no"). But it is put in such a way that makes it impossible for Clinton to say yes, as his own answer explains: "No, because I didn't get him" (Line 36). Wallace rejoins with an approving "right" (Line 37). It is at this point Clinton appears visibly most angry (with noticeable facial convulsion). He points his finger at Wallace each time he refers to "the right-wingers who are attacking me now" (Line 38), gesturing out his situational understanding that Wallace is from the opposite camp before he finally makes this explicit: "You did your nice little conservative hit job on me" (Line 38).

What does Clinton say when he is visibly most enraged? He basically turns the interview itself into a meta-critique of the legitimacy of the interview itself. Clinton assumes the role of a news critic and points to the partiality of a biased journalist. If, as Schudson points out, it is very much an American tradition for everyone to assume the role of a "certified media critic" (1995:3), the norms that people use to ground their criticisms are surprisingly uniform—the news interview, as a journalistic form, is held to comply with the journalistic ideals of balance and fairness (Clayman and Heritage 2002; Clayman 2004; Schudson 1978). Clinton's anger narrative appeals to these ideals as justification. A *biased* interview is no longer a news interview. This accusation of partiality allows Clinton to put his anger on the offensive. In response, Wallace looks surprised and baffled by Clinton's responses. He defends his objectivity by asking Clinton the following negative question (which presupposes a negative answer): "You don't think that's a legitimate question?" (Line 41).

Clinton's rejoinder is instructive. His answer amounts to saying that Wallace's question is *legitimate* in abstract but *illegitimate in situ*. Clinton continues to deploy the principle of impartiality in making the claim. He performatively brings out Wallace's bias through a series of rhetorical questions that aims to show that he is the only person targeted by his interviewer (it does not appear that Clinton expects Wallace to say yes and come up with a number to the following questions): "I want to know how many people in the Bush administration you asked this question of. I want to know how many people in the Bush administration you asked, 'Why didn't you do anything about the Cole?' I want to know how many you asked, 'Why did you fire Dick Clarke?' I want to know how many people you asked..." (Line 42). Clinton keeps returning to the same point—that the question unfairly singles him out as the person responsible for the 9/11 attack; it violates the principle of impartiality when Wallace does not ask the other side the same "legitimate" question.

To the string of questions, Wallace replies vaguely "We asked." Wallace then comes back with a question he does not anticipate Clinton responding to affirmatively: "Do you ever watch *Fox News Sunday*, sir?" (Line 45). Wallace's question is sharp but its offensive force gambles on the fact that Clinton probably never watched the program before, a guess that nonetheless unintentionally confirms the perception that Fox caters to a conservative audience. Clinton ignores Wallace's question and presses the interviewer to answer his questions first: "Tell the truth, Chris." (Line 50) Clinton's statement is at once an explicit call and an implicit comment. It comments by presupposing that Wallace has been lying, or at least not forthcoming with his questions up to that point—hence, "tell the truth." This once again performatively takes a swing at Wallace's credibility—a journalist who lies has too much to hide to be impartial.

Wallace again does not commit himself to a simple "yes/no" answer but says: "With Iraq and Afghanistan, there's plenty of stuff to ask." (Line 51) At this point, Clinton makes explicit his accusation of Wallace's dishonesty—the initial reason to invite him to talk about his work on climate change is merely a pretext ("And you don't care." Line 52). Clinton then explains to Wallace and anyone who watches the interview how he sees the episode—the interview is set up for the sole purpose of putting the bin Laden question to him. That is the "real reason" for the interview. Wallace refutes Clinton's criticism by falling back on the notion of *formal* impartiality—half of the questions are about the Clinton Global Initiative ("But President Clinton, if you look at the questions here, you'll see half the questions are about that." Line 53). And Wallace does eventually ask his questions on climate change in the remaining last third of the interview. (In fact, as Clinton gets angrier, at one point acknowledging "I am upset," it is Wallace who appears to be the one eager to move on to the topic of climate change.) It is difficult to know for sure whether Wallace does it in response to Clinton's outburst or as he has originally planned. It is of course good practice among journalists to prepare for more questions than they can practically include in an interview, especially with an interviewee as important as Clinton.

For the last seven and a half minutes of the interview, the conversation returns to a state of faux normalcy, as if the bin Laden question had never been raised. At the end of the interview, the two manage to end with a somewhat perfunctory handshake.

LIMITATIONS OF OUR CASES

While our examples show how emotion is at work in social spaces where actors are supposed to leave their emotions out, we acknowledge that the two cases both represent a rarified social setting with its peculiar interactional dynamics. The institutional setting in which the episodes took place, the news interview, certainly promotes purposeful conversations. Both cases are also masculine, in more ways than one. First, the emotion in focus, anger, is often understood as a “masculine power” emotion. While the two cases offer insights as to how two powerful politicians in two different societies might deploy different cultural scripts to perform emotion, they are limiting in terms of revealing how social positions interact with emotional contents. Second, the widely shared aversion to emotions in the political sphere has much to do with the cultural constitution of the political sphere as a “male” domain. Taken together, the setting of the two cases may favor our thesis that emotive performance is reflexive and communicative. In other kinds of social encounters, emotional responses may be expressed in more bodily and visceral forms. It is therefore paramount for future research to examine the utility of the concept in other social settings.

CONCLUSION

We began our inquiry by challenging the view that emotion results from irrational exuberance. Instead, we argued that social actors experience and interpret the world through the network of their emotional and practical, as well as ideal interests. We then built on existing theories to propose that displays of emotion can be studied as a form of social performance—emotions can be reasoned about and emotive performance is the act of reasoning about emotion. The concept shows that distinctions between “emotional” and “rational,” or “instrumental” and “expressive” have mistakenly displaced the wholeness of social interactions. Emotive performances are public and can be studied empirically; they occur in specific interactional settings; and above all, they are reflexive acts that entail at once the expression of emotion and the justification of that expression. Such reflexivity, however, is not unbounded and abstract. Performance of strong emotion requires strong reasons for it to be legitimate; and it is here we find the sedimented role of culture as providing the basis for mutual intelligibility and social appropriateness.

To illustrate emotionality, our concept of emotive performance, we analyzed emotive performances of anger by Jiang Zemin and Bill Clinton. The conventional belief that emotion defies reasoning crumbles in face of the highly narrated nature of these performances. We found that however abrupt, unique, and dramatic the two individual performances may appear, both are rooted in a certain cultural preserve, in the specific sense that different narratives can be found to encase their expressions of anger.

Our discussion of emotive performance suggests a more expansive research agenda for sociology. It pushes sociologists to pay greater attention to people’s experiences, interpretations, and deployments of emotions in social life. Clearly, there is a need for more studies of the role of emotion in different aspects of social life.

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