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0521857953 - Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual

Edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen and Jason L. Mast

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## Social Performance

This pathbreaking volume makes a powerful case for a new direction in cultural sociology and for social scientific analysis more generally. Taking a “cultural pragmatic” approach to meaning, the contributors suggest a new way of looking at the continuum that stretches between ritual and strategic action. They do so by developing, for the first time, a model of “social performance” that applies not only to micro- but to macro-sociology. This new model is relevant not only to contemporary analysis but to comparative and historical issues, and it is as sensitive to power as it is to cultural structures. The metaphor of performance has long been used by sociologists and humanists to explore not only the social world but literary texts, but this volume offers the first systematic and analytical framework that transforms the metaphor into a social theory and applies it to a series of fascinating large-scale social and cultural processes – from September 11 and the Clinton/Lewinsky Affair, to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Willy Brandt’s famous “kneefall” before the Warsaw Memorial. Building on works by Austin and Derrida on the one side, and Durkheim, Goffman and Turner on the other, *Social Performance* offers a new perspective that will be of great interest to scholars and students alike in the social sciences, humanities, and theatre arts.

JEFFREY C. ALEXANDER is the Lillian Chavenson Saden Professor of Sociology and also Chair of the Sociology Department at Yale University. He is the author of *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (2003), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (with Eyerman, Giesen, Smelser, and Sztompka) (2004), and the editor (with Philip Smith) of *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim* (2005).

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*Axial Age* (Cambridge 1998) and *Triumph and Trauma* (2004).

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Life itself is a dramatically enacted thing.

Erving Goffman

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