



Sebastian Jobs

WELCOME HOME, BOYS!

Military Victory Parades in New York City 1899–1946

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Sebastian Jobs is a research fellow at the Graduate School “Cultural Encounters and the Discourses of Scholarship” in Rostock. Among his recent publications are two edited volumes: “Unsettling History: Archiving and Narrating in Historiography” (2010, co-edited with Alf Lüdtke) and “Embodiments of Cultural Encounters” (2011, co-edited with Gesa Mackenthun).

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Introduction

“If there is one thing that the New York public
likes better than another it is a parade.”
The New York Times, 1899

In July of 1991 following “Operation Desert Storm,” Generals Schwarzkopf and Powell as well as U.S. Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney led a parade of 12,000 Gulf War veterans and 6,000 more from earlier wars. Manhattan was booming when the soldiers and spectators celebrated the undisputed victory of the American forces in Iraq. Police estimated that a crowd of 4.7 million joyous and flag-waving people flanked the route of march. Emotions ran high when, on that day, 6,000 tons of ticker tape and 10,000 tons of confetti were showered on the troops from the buildings alongside the ‘Canyon of Heroes’—the unofficial name for the lower section of Manhattan’s Broadway.¹ Yet, as impressive as this performance was in that very moment, its political meaning transcended the immediate context of the parade. With the presence of veterans from many wars, this celebration displayed the military achievements in the Middle East in the light of past heroic deeds and, in that, went well beyond recent history. In reference to the controversial Vietnam War, the *Army Times*, a newspaper for active and retired personnel of the U.S. Army and the U.S. National Guard, took the opportunity to interpret the march as a vehicle of historical revision: from the Army’s point of view, the parade was a chance to “salve old wounds.” It seemed as if the celebratory joy over victory in Iraq were not a mere display of success but in itself a sweet medicine that could overcome and heal the social and political divisions over the Vietnam War.² The parade was a ‘magical’ force that could produce seemingly real images of triumph and tangible ideas of a unified nation.

This discourse about the almost ‘magical’ powers of victory parades was not new in 1991. Rather, it took up traditions of military pageantry

1 “Million Attend Ticker-tape Parade,” *Baltimore Sun*, 11 June 1991, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1991-06-11/news/1991162064_1_desert-storm-ticker-tape-operation-desert (accessed 7 May 2012).

2 “Victory parades salve old wounds,” *Army Times*, 24 June 1991, 10–11.

long practiced in New York City, “the nation’s parade ground.”³ With its millions of immigrants, the port city of New York since the early 19th century had not only become a metropolis that integrated a great variety of political, ethnic and social beliefs. Given this cultural diversity, people had also found a variety of ways to publicly show their colors: the St. Patrick’s Day parade and the firefighters’ march were public celebrations of group solidarity and demonstrations of social power and influence. In addition, the city also became the stage for public celebrations of national importance. In the 19th century, when the nation’s capital, Washington, DC, was still a less impressive sight compared to Manhattan’s very elegant Fifth Avenue and Broadway, which seemed much more suitable for welcoming state visitors like the Marquis de Lafayette in 1825 or the Japanese delegation to the U.S. in 1871. In the same vein, the deceased presidents Lincoln and Grant were publicly mourned and honored with parades in New York. By the end of the 19th century, New Yorkers had become seasoned hosts and had found a ceremonial formula for parading. The section of Lower Broadway between Battery Park and City Hall, as well as Fifth Avenue, had become the primary parade route. Moreover, by the end of the 19th century, the best-known feature of New York’s parades had been introduced to the toolbox of public celebrations: the throwing of ticker tape, which allegedly erupted spontaneously during the dedication of the Statue of Liberty in 1886. In taking up these traditions, military parades since the late 19th century have been an expression of an American triumphal spirit combining civil and military protocol and connecting the political arena with popular culture. This combination of ideology and entertainment created a powerful stage for community-building.

The following study dwells on both the continuities and the dynamic changes that victory parades in New York City underwent during the period between 1899 and 1946. This time frame reflects major thresholds on both the national and the local level. In 1899, following the Spanish-American War, war hero Admiral George Dewey made his return to American soil with a giant victory celebration in New York City. More than 46 years later, in January 1946, the city celebrated another great victory of American warfare when the Army’s 82nd Airborne Division, the so-called ‘All-American,’ made its appearance on Manhattan’s Fifth Avenue. To scholars, these dates define two crucial points in the history of Ameri-

3 Brooks McNamara, *Day of Jubilee: the Great Age of Public Celebrations in New York, 1788–1909* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

can foreign relations. The first, the military success in the Pacific during Spanish-American War, marked the end of U.S. isolationism and the beginning of the nation's growing political influence beyond the American continent. The second marked the homecoming of U.S. troops after their two victories in Europe and the Pacific in 1945, when U.S. power shone as never before. While many historians think the war of 1898 represents the rise of an American empire, the end of World War II marks the climax of this power, but, at the same time, also the "end of victory culture" in the U.S. They argue that military involvements in Korea and Vietnam during the Cold War undermined the moral and military superiority that had seemed incontestable after the 'Good War.'⁴ Yet, these dates are not only important cornerstones in the history of American foreign relations; they also directly relate to New York's history: they circumscribe the heyday of military pageantry in the city.

This book traces the trajectories and activities of the principal actors in the drama of parades: the planners, the soldiers, and the spectators. Focusing on the event itself and its main actors, it opens up perspectives on the microdynamics of power that made these parades work. In order to examine such processes, the study employs various methods and theoretical concepts taken from history, ethnography, and performance studies. The general interest that binds these approaches together is the idea of the performative—the idea that events like victory parades were not mere representations of facts that had been established beforehand, but productive instances themselves. When soldiers marched on Fifth Avenue, these pageants enacted a kind of street theater in which meaning was created in the very moment of action (or acting). Symbolically marking the homecoming of the servicemen, they ritually brought an end to the preceding war. For many of the drafted soldiers, such parades provided a last opportunity to wear their uniforms before returning to their civilian lives. Furthermore, for contemporaries these marches were events in which ideas like nation, state and race were displayed as well as enacted and produced. For those marching and/or watching, these abstract concepts gained a tangible and palpable quality as they were embodied through the very presence of soldiers, the display of flags, and the patriotic cheering of the crowds. When the strong bodies of American servicemen marched behind

⁴Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995).

“Old Glory,” they came to symbolize the strength of a victorious nation in general. In this respect, victory parades were a retrospective interpretation of the past war that reproduced and stabilized common historical narratives of national unity. Thus, they operated within three different time frames. While they dwelt upon traditions and common narratives from the past, during the event itself they refined, stabilized or changed these interpretations. As a result, they also hinted at a glorious future for the individual participants and America as a whole.

The study’s focus on the performative makes it possible to explore the creation of meaning as an act of collaboration among those who planned the parades and the soldiers and spectators who participated in them. Within this complex web of actors, there was room for diverging interpretations and for agency. The structure of the book reflects the ways in which these actors interacted and how they changed: after a short discussion of basic theoretical concepts and methodology, I present one case study, the “Harlem Hellfighters” parade of February 1919, to exemplify how complicities and antagonisms between these groups worked in detail. Moreover, the focus on this particular parade offers insights into race-relations in post-World-War-One America and, therefore, contributes to a deeper understanding of African American history.

Each of the three chapters that follow this first case study looks at one group at a time. First, the analysis of the parade organizers’ planning processes reveals an increasing involvement of state institutions as promoters of patriotism. In 1899, following the Spanish-American War, organization lay in the hands of an ad-hoc committee of 1,000 ‘honorable’ men who considered their civic engagement not only a duty but also an honor. However, after World War I, voluntary parade organization almost disappeared as an arena of social interaction when the “Mayor’s Committee of Welcome Home-Coming Troops” (later the “Mayor’s Reception Committee”) was formed and much of the planning was removed from the public sphere. The parade lost its surprising and spectacular character and became a rather foreseeable matter of bureaucratic standardization. The second group of organizers were military officials who were mainly interested in enforcing disciplinary rules and regulations that would form a perfect body of soldiers marching like a machine.

Second, soldiers experienced their celebratory homecoming as a ritual of reintegration. One of the recurring themes in the celebrations was the figure of the citizen-soldier, which linked warfare with concepts of citizen-

ship and gender. Military victory parades made this relationship explicit because they provided a stage on which primarily male actors performed or, one could even say, presented a way to “do nation.” In this sense, the meaning of the soldiers’ bodies transcended their own physical boundaries as they became embodiments of the nation. Their service and their sacrifices were visible in their bodies—which could be strong, wounded, or dead—and allowed for the personification of the hardships the whole country had endured. At the same time, physical recovery and medical support also demonstrated the national will to heal both the individual and the country. These processes of coping with change, crisis, and reintegration were acted out according to contemporary ideas of discipline and hygiene. Consequently, parades were practices of identification in which the soldierly bodies served as seemingly irrevocable truths and symbols that gave witness to the men’s service and dedication as well as images of national strength and vulnerability. In these oscillating movements, they were both bodies politic and natural: they were both the origin and the result of multiple construction and identification processes. The servicemen, however, found ways to evade the regulations of discipline and parade drill: for instance, by interacting with the people in the audience.

Spectators, the third group, were often unwilling to uphold the boundaries between the street and the sidewalks, which the organizers had established, and tried to be an active part of the show. On the street, soldiers acted from their performative status as manly heroes and took the stage in order to joke and comment upon members of the audience. On the other side of the line of police, spectators applauded, commented, cheered, and threw gifts. In this way, they became part of the spectacle and of the causes it celebrated. Sometimes spectators even pushed very hard to get on the street. Repeatedly, people broke through the police lines and blocked the street even to the point that the sophisticated military formation of the parade had to disperse and march in lines of two (not of 16)—sometimes they were even forced to halt the entire march. Thus, there were (at least) two spectacles going on at the same time, interfering with each other. Police tried to enforce the separation of areas of activity, as organizers reacted to and anticipated the behavior of the audience, both in order to please them and to increase the entertainment value of the event. While the organizers to create an atmosphere of ‘orderly excess,’ both soldiers and spectators tried to extend their assigned room to maneuver and interpret the celebrations according to their own expectations.

By analyzing the interactions among these three groups of actors on a local level, it is possible to relate the situational complexities of victory parades to the so-called big questions in U.S. history that are closely connected to concepts like citizenship, identity and modernity. Nationalism and patriotism were the political basis for these events, in which both individual and collective identities were claimed and acted out. Especially the public march of citizen-soldiers—men who were drafted to defend *their* country—enabled spectators and soldiers alike to experience the deep connection between individual civil rights and collective national duty. For instance, when the heroes of the Spanish-American War returned, the homecoming parade was an opportunity to update and to adjust America's self-image as a major player in world politics. These attempts to establish what it meant to be American were moments of inclusion and exclusion that became tangible through the very act of parading. Moreover, in the face of these defining processes, another question arises that is very closely related to the image of an American nation: how did race and ethnicity figure in the parades? This was especially important after World War I, the first war in which great numbers of African Americans were drafted into the army to serve as citizen-soldiers. Given the history of overt discrimination, would they receive the same kind of warm and enthusiastic welcome as their 'white' counterparts? In addition, the study shows how discourses of modernity were part of the performances. The parades celebrated well-disciplined soldierly bodies that functioned like a machine and hailed the emergence of highly effective weapons used in the wars.

Parades were performative events, so one of the theoretical challenges of the study is the emphasis on the ephemeral. Through this lens that focuses on situational configurations, the book addresses an array of more general methodological questions that refer to and build upon three wide-ranging debates in history and in much of the cultural studies. One is the role of public celebrations for representing and, further, reshaping the body politic. Secondly, how and to what extent do these very practices solidify and also, if not primarily, nuance, criticize, and even transform these relations? Third, what role do emotions and ways of expressing them play in these interactions? Moreover, what kind of analysis is appropriate and suitable for tracing the situational and, in particular, ambivalent modes of behavior and articulation which various actors employ before, during and after the respective public events? The following "performative preliminaries" will take up these questions and develop a set of concepts and

theories that helps us to understand and conceptualize parades as events of performative force.

1 Performative Preliminaries

“Power served pomp, not pomp power.”
Clifford Geertz

So how can the idea of the performative help us to understand victory parades as ephemeral events? Forty years ago sociologist Jürgen Habermas announced the “demise of the representative publicness” that had taken place during the late 18th century. In his classic study *The Transformation of the Public Sphere*, he described how European bourgeois societies created a modern public sphere that was depersonalized and based mainly on the virtues of capitalist trade. People turned away from the ‘superficial’ rites and ceremonies of kings and popes; the arena in which ideas were exchanged, instead, was public media, primarily text-based, such as newspapers, periodicals, and books.¹ Still, more than two hundred years after the American and French Revolutions, performances remain a vivid and important part of the public sphere. Why else would several hundred thousand people bother to flock to Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, for the inauguration of Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States? Why would Americans care about marching in a parade on July 4th? Why would spectators rise for the Star-Spangled Banner before every sports event in America? These are political practices in which the performative takes different shades and forms, and, far from being mere echoes of a premodern age, they remain a part of people’s everyday lives. Therefore, historians have conducted research that shows how the public stage has been widely used, for instance, by governmental actors—monarchic as well as democratic—to demonstrate their power or to gain legitimacy for their

1 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 12 & 14–19; Jürgen Habermas, “Politischer Ausdruck und Rituelles Verhalten: ein Rückblick auf Cassirer und Gehlen,” in *Institutionalität und Symbolisierung: Verfestigungen kultureller Ordnungsmuster in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, ed. Gert Melville (Köln: Böhlau, 2001), 53–67.

actions.² Let me, therefore, briefly map out how historians have so far used the perspective on performances and public rituals for their research.

1.1 Public Celebrations in Recent Historiography

For a long time, historiographical occupation with rituals and performances was principally limited to subjects that were seen as either pre-modern or primitive.³ When ancient Roman citizens celebrated triumphs or medieval rulers visited a city, almost every element of the celebration followed strict rules that served the representation and production of power to the people, allies and political enemies alike. When an emperor and a pope convened, these meetings followed the strict directives of diplomacy and heraldry. As distant as they seem, these rules of conduct and the titles survived through the 19th century and are still echoed in today's diplomatic encounters.⁴ Since the 1980s, the subject of political theatricality has also come into the focus of those who are interested in modern history, as well. For a long time, the street has been a medium for making social, religious or commercial messages of various kinds public. Historians have shown how the street has been used as an arena to demonstrate political power and make social claims but also to entertain—often at the same time. However, outdoor celebrations—royal, religious, military—provided an opportunity to use the street as a stage for carnival, commercial pageants and outdoor drama and brought together spectators and participants of different origins.

2 David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988).

3 Cf. Gerd Althoff, ed., *Formen und Funktionen öffentlicher Kommunikation im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2001); Gerd Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale: Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003); Gerd Althoff, "Inszenierung verpflichtet: zum Verständnis ritueller Akte bei Papst-Kaiser-Begegnungen im 12. Jahrhundert," in *Geschichtswissenschaft und 'performative turn': Ritual, Inszenierung und Performanz vom Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit*, ed. Jürgen Martschukat and Steffen Patzold (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), 105–132.

4 With his book, Johannes Paulmann has convincingly discussed the importance of pomp and ceremonies as means of diplomatic encounter during the long 19th century: Johannes Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik – Monarchenbegegnungen in Europa zwischen Ancien Régime und Erstem Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001).

Performances are a means of creating order. They are central to the demonstration and creation of the power of the state.⁵ Many scholars have shown how ritualized procedures like inaugurations, court trials or even executions play a crucial role in symbolizing government control and state order.⁶ A look back at the early phase of the American Republic shows how this kind of ritual institution-building was also a way of giving abstract government institutions a face. When George Washington took his first oath of office at Federal Hall in New York City in 1789, the new American government took the stage with him, as well. European rituals and ceremonies, both royal and religious, provided a performative and aesthetic background for the celebrations—so much that sometimes the similarities were even too striking.⁷

Yet, this institution-building was not a mere top-down affair. Right after the revolution, when Americans had finally succeeded in their fight for political independence from Great Britain, the subjects of the crown now had to define themselves as American citizens. In this transitional moment, public celebrations, festivities and processions allowed people to explore this new role and were, thus, crucial to the construction of a genuinely American political sphere. Among the great number of celebrations and festivities,⁸ the most prominent ones were the Federal Processions in 1787 and 1788. These elaborate festivals were organized by the Federalists, supporters of the newly drafted Constitution, to woo people and build support

5 For discussions on the concept of 'ritual': Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone: Re-inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), Ursula Rao and Klaus-Peter Köpping, "Einleitung, Die 'performative Wende': Leben – Ritual – Theater," in *Im Rausch des Rituals: Gestaltung und Transformation der Wirklichkeit in körperlicher Performanz*, ed. Ursula Rao and Klaus-Peter Köpping (Hamburg: LIT, 2000), 1–31.

6 Jürgen Martschukat, *Die Geschichte der Todesstrafe in Nordamerika: von der Kolonialzeit bis zur Gegenwart* (München: Beck, 2002), 50–65, Jürgen Martschukat, "The Duty of Society": Todesstrafe als Performance der Modernität in den USA um 1900," in *Geschichtswissenschaft und 'performative turn': Ritual, Inszenierung und Performanz vom Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit*, ed. Jürgen Martschukat and Steffen Patzold (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), 229–253, Annulla Linders, "The Execution Spectacle and State legitimacy: the Changing Nature of the American Execution Audience, 1833–1937," *Law & Society Review* 35, no. 3 (2002), 607–656.

7 Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 46 & 51.

8 David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: the Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

for its ratification. For those who had formerly been under British colonial rule, these parades and feasts not only reflected but acted out the democratic ideals of the new republic. In this respect, they provided the celebrants and spectators an opportunity to actually live and test these ideals for a brief period of time—whether they supported the new political order or considered themselves critics. The processions in which artisans, merchants and clergy marched side by side made the new ideals of democratic equality palpable and the difference to British society visible to spectators and participants. Therefore, these processions were not only events of being, but of becoming American. Not surprisingly, however, women and African Americans were excluded from this community of grass-roots patriotism.⁹ The performances created an image of a white, male American citizenry.

In this vein, the “festival state” is at the heart of many studies that focus on both the organizers’ intentions and their perspectives ‘from above’ as well as on the public responses ‘from below,’ including its resistance or cooperation with political institutions.¹⁰ This raises the question of how non-governmental actors have made use of the medium of the ‘street.’ In her groundbreaking book *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, first published in 1984, historian Lynn Hunt analyzed “symbolic forms of political practice” and communication after the French Revolution in 1789. Her findings stressed the extent to which, in the years following the revolution, institutional politics became intertwined with the lives of individuals and how these individuals became citizens of the new French Republic through the state’s use of symbols and festivities. According to Hunt, the

9 Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*; Jürgen Heideking, *Die Verfassung vor dem Richterstuhl: Vorgeschichte und Ratifizierung der amerikanischen Verfassung* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988); Jürgen Heideking, “Celebrating the Constitution: the Federal Processions of 1788 and the Emergence of a Republican Festive Culture in the United States,” in *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation: American Festive culture from the Revolution to the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. Geneviève Fabre, Jürgen Heideking, and Kai Dreisbach (New York: Berghahn, 2001), 25–43; Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1986).

10 Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: the Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Mabel Berezin, “The Festival State: Celebration and Commemoration in Fascist Italy,” *Journal of Modern European History* 3, no. 1 (2006), 60–74; Yvonne Karow, *Deutsches Opfer: kultische Selbstausslöschung auf den Reichsparteitagen der NSDAP* (Berlin: Akad.-Verl., 1997); Peter Reichel, *Der schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches: Faszination und Gewalt des Faschismus* (München: Hanser, 1991); Malte Rolf, *Das sowjetische Massenfest* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006).

line between political, carnivalesque and commercial performances was impossible to draw.¹¹

The street was the ‘place to be,’ not only for political leaders, but also for those who protested and celebrated, whether for ethnic, religious or social reasons. Thus, the question of “who owns the street” has long been about social and political influence beyond the political arena of ‘the state.’ Social historians have shown how public celebrations in American cities have been contested terrain. In the United States, the population was composed of various immigrant groups with very different ethnic, social and religious backgrounds.¹² By the mid-19th century, many new immigrants began to show their ethnic pride by staging parades and processions. While Irish immigrants celebrated St. Patrick’s Day in the cities on the East Coast, Germans in the Midwest organized Turner festivals and marched in honor of their national heroes such as Schiller or Goethe and held Carnival to celebrate their cultural heritage. In this tradition, German Americans in New York City today still celebrate the annual Steuben parade. Drawing on religious traditions or ethno-cultural symbols that stressed features of a group’s origin and heritage, these processions and festivities were also political statements. When marchers displayed group solidarity on St. Patrick’s Day, they simultaneously showed people outside the community the strength and unity of the Irish population. This political element was even more obvious in a Philadelphia parade of African Americans marching annually to fete the end of slave trade after 1808. White people put up serious resistance to this demonstrative sense of belonging and of solidarity.¹³

11 Lynn Avery Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004). In this focal turn to the festive, Hunt seconded Mona Ozouf, who in 1976 had already published her work about the *fêtes révolutionnaires*, the festivities and pageants during the French Revolution as an element of political life: Mona Ozouf, *La fête révolutionnaire: 1789–1799* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

12 David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: the Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); David Glassberg, “Civic Celebration and the Invention of Urban Public,” *Mid-America: an Historical Review* 82, no. 1/2 (2000), 147–172.

13 Heike Bungert, “Demonstrating the Values of ‘Gemüthlichkeit’ and ‘Cultur’ – the Festivals of German Americans in Milwaukee, 1870–1910,” in *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation: American Festive Culture from the Revolution to the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. Geneviève Fabre, Jürgen Heideking, and Kai Dreisbach (New York: Berghahn, 2001), 175–193; Kathleen Conzen, “Ethnicity as Festive Culture: Nineteenth-Century German America on Parade,” in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Oxford

However, the street also served as a place for processions that were even more directly labeled as political events: protest marches. In 19th-century New York City, people who felt underprivileged and stripped of political influence frequently took to the streets as a space that seemed readily available to them. Especially after the 1840s, an increasing number of immigrants from Ireland and Germany clashed with self-proclaimed American nativists over issues of religion and political participation.¹⁴ Furthermore, union members demonstrated for better working conditions, while firefighters and policemen marched to display their professional solidarity.¹⁵ Political movements of the early 20th century stood in this tradition, as well: women demonstrated for voting rights, and NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) activists protested violent attacks on African Americans, especially in the American South.¹⁶ The NAACP's optical presence on the streets of the Northern metropolis of New York, in particular, set a counterpoint to the public demonstrations of the Ku Klux Klan in the South.¹⁷ These instances, which lay the foundation for the "street politics"¹⁸ of the Civil Rights

University Press, 1989), 44–76; Shane White, "It was a Proud Day: African-Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741–1834," *Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (1994), 13–50; Kenneth Moss, "St. Patrick's Day Celebrations and the Formation of Irish-American Identity, 1845–1875," *Journal of Social History* 29, no. 1 (1995), 125–148.

14 Joanne Reitano, *The Restless City: a Short History of New York from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

15 Davis, *Parades and Power*.

16 Birgitta Bader-Zaar, "'With Banners Flying': a Comparative View of Women's Suffrage Demonstrations, 1906–1914," in *The Street as Stage: Protest Marches and Public Rallies Since the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Matthias Reiss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 105–124.

17 The closing scene of the motion picture "Birth of the nation" (1915) features a parade of clansmen marching down a street with an American flag. For the importance of performative politics for the early Ku Klux Klan, cf. Elaine Frantz Parsons, "Midnight rangers: costume and performance in the reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan," *The Journal of American History* 92, no. 3 (2005), 811–836.

18 Cf. Thomas Lindenberger, *Straßenpolitik: zur Sozialgeschichte der öffentlichen Ordnung in Berlin, 1900–1914* (Bonn: Dietz Nachf., 1995). On the performative aspect of demonstrations and protest: Richard Schechner, "The Street is the Stage," in *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*, ed. Richard Schechner (New York: Routledge, 1993), 45–93; Baz Kershaw, "Fighting in the Streets: Dramaturgies of Popular Protest, 1968–1989," *New Theatre Quarterly* 13, no. 51 (1997), 255–276.

Movement and of modern American protest culture,¹⁹ show that it is hard to draw a line between a political performance and a protest march.²⁰

Moreover, the street was always a space people claimed for reasons that appear less political, as well. Street entertainment often drew huge crowds in the 19th century; entertainment idol P.T. Barnum was especially successful with his public circus performances, such as when he had an elephant march on the streets of Manhattan. In recent times, the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade has continued this tradition, which combines the carnivalesque with commercial interests.²¹

To sum up, parades and other public celebrations have the potential to include and exclude people. They can either provide the stage for social uprising or gloss over social conflicts.²² What becomes apparent in many of these studies is that public celebrations have functioned on many different levels, for instance, as political statements or propaganda, as rituals to promote a sense of community, or simply as commercial entertainment. Thus, they cannot be analyzed in simple dichotomies of above/below or public/private. Rather, they combine two seemingly contradictory aspects of participation and power. On the one hand, public performances can create order and stability. On the other hand, the need for constant re-performance generates room for deviation and uncertainty. Stability and change seem to be two sides of the same coin. Although most of the above-mentioned studies acknowledge the crucial role of public celebrations, few address the very moment of the performance itself, when a particular sense or meaning comes into being.²³

19 Rebekah J. Kowal, "Staging the Greensboro Sit-ins," *The Drama Review* 48, no. 4 (2004), 135–154; Ronald Lutz, "Aufmärsche, Demonstrationen und Straßenarrangements: Zur Dynamik eines kulturellen Entwurfs," in *Triumphzüge: Paraden durch Raum und Zeit*, ed. Harald Kimpel and Johanna Werckmeister (Marburg: Jonas-Verlag, 2001), 74–93.

20 Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Michael Kaplan, "New York City Tavern Violence and the Creation of a Working-class Male Identity," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15, no. 4 (1995), 591–617; Adrian Cook, *The Armies of the Streets: the New York City Draft Riots of 1863* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1974).

21 Jean Asthon, "P.T. Barnum," and Elaine Abelson, "R.H. Macy," in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 78 & 1002–1003.

22 McNamara, *Day of Jubilee*.

23 By focusing on capital punishment in the U.S. as a performance Jürgen Marschukat shows the many different layers of meaning in executions: Martschukat, "The Duty of Society'."

For instance, in her article on ‘The American parade,’ which was clearly influenced by the discussion about the use of ethnological theories for historical work, historian Mary Ryan in 1988 suggested viewing public celebrations, similar to texts, as structural representations of the society in which they take place. By analyzing parades, historians can find out more about the ways in which historical individuals and groups read and acted out “a social vocabulary, impressing their group identities on the minds of countless bystanders.”²⁴ Without any further interpretation, it seems practical to take this short phrase as an impetus to explore both the opportunities and shortcomings of this emphasis on the structural stabilities of performances and offer alternative approaches that could also shine light on their situational and more ambiguous qualities. I would like to begin by discussing the notion of “identity.”

1.2 Identity in Question: Text or Performance?

Identity concepts, ranging from family, gender, and nation to sports fandom, refer to allegedly common ideas and discursive relations of power that define an individual or collective entity.²⁵ But the concept of identity poses a fundamental problem to historians who attempt to address it: on the one hand, historical actors invoke certain core features that all members of a group seem to share and may have inherited from a common historical past and then base their political and social action upon this historically informed ‘identity.’ On the other hand, as historical research has shown, this seeming continuity and the mythical origins and roots expressed in such an idea of a past are constantly remodeled, challenged and updated in the present. Although it has almost become a cliché, the concept of “invented traditions,” which historians Terence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm coined some 25 years ago, remains helpful, since it radically reveals the fictive character of any claim to identity and continuity: societies often legitimize current action through references to past tradi-

24 Mary Ryan, “The American Parade,” in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Avery Hunt and Aletta Biersack (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 131–153, esp. 139.

25 Rogers Brubaker and Cooper Frederick, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000), 1–47.

tions that, at the same time, are always viewed from the present. As a result, these claims are socially constructed—or one could say “invented”—in light of contemporary ideas and demands. Benedict Anderson echoes these notions in *Imagined Communities* when he describes similar aspects of construction in regard to nation- and tradition-building in Southeast Asia during the 19th century.²⁶

It becomes clear that scholars have to take the concept of ‘identity’ very seriously as one historical actors employed, for example, to advance a certain political agenda. This invocation of identities in the past, however, does not mean that researchers utilizing the concept as a research tool in the present should take their stable existence for granted. In her essay “Fantasy Echo,” historian Joan Scott stressed the highly constructed character of historical identities against the backdrop of invention and imagination.²⁷ Although critics of such arguments seriously call the benefit of ‘identity’ as a research tool into question, most agree that the presumption of their ‘constructedness’ denies neither that identities are real for the people who identify with a certain idea, nor that they have any effect on those people’s lives. Yet what makes ‘identity’ so troubling for historians is the sense of sameness and stability the term evokes.²⁸ As an attribute for individuals, ‘identity’ assumes an inner stability or a continuity of qualities, whereas collective ‘identities’ refer to a pool of shared values, bodily features or traditions, to name just a few possibilities. These mythical stabilities camouflage individual differences and allow for a mythical wholeness of both individuals and groups. While ‘identity’ might be a concept historical actors use as a basis for their actions, it is rather problematic for historians themselves. Identities often have a historical meaning to the actors, and they use them to communicate stability in terms of origin and tradition, yet these identities remain abstract until they are invoked or practiced,

26 Terence Ranger and Eric J. Hobsbawm, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2003).

27 Joan W. Scott, “Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 2 (2001), 284–304.

28 Definition in Merriam–Webster’s: “sameness of essential or generic character in different instances.” “identity.” *Merriam–Webster Online Dictionary*. 2009. *Merriam–Webster Online*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/identity> (accessed 20 July 2009).

and, thus, made palpable in some way.²⁹ Identities, actually, never predate their concrete invocation, whether in performances, symbols or in speech. They rely on constant reperformance and frequent reaffirmations in order to appear stable.³⁰

To resolve this conceptual hurdle, I suggest historians take up Stuart Hall's approach, that is, changing the focus of analysis from 'identity' to 'practices of identification.' Such an approach emphasizes the dynamics of identity construction and brings parallel or even contradictory movements within these processes into view. Instead of highlighting the structural element of 'identity,' this perspective focuses on the moment an identity claim is made, invoked and acted out.³¹ Acting out identity, especially, brings up the notion of 'performance,' which requires some further explanation.

For all their methodological differences, the studies quoted above stress one aspect of performances that contradicts the thesis of "the demise of the representative publicness" outlined by Habermas: public rituals and performances are not mere mirrors of society, but in the actual moment of their execution, they construct and constitute categories and realities of social (dis-)order. They are instances of both stability and change, of being as well as of becoming. But how can we describe these dynamics in analytical terms?

Methodologically, most of the above-mentioned (historical) studies do not limit themselves to the concepts and theories of their own academic discipline, but find themselves in the interdisciplinary nexus of many. In her approach, historian Mary Ryan very much followed ethnologist Clifford Geertz's idea that a particular culture is an overarching text that is constantly read and interpreted by those native to it. So, according to Geertz, what researchers are looking for is the "native's point of view," which is his or her reading or interpretation of the cultural text that surrounds and unconsciously guides his/her action. Like ethnologists, who

29 Michel Foucault discussed the notion of 'origin' in the essay "Afterword: the Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 208–226.

30 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222–237.

31 Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Scott, "Fantasy Echo"; Homi Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative," in *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 2004), 57–93.

rely on this firsthand reading to construct their own—at least—secondhand interpretation of the culture, historians should look for social structures.³² During the 1980s, these ethnological theories were widely successful and influential among historians, who used the interpretive method of “thick description,” especially, for their own research.³³

In accordance with this interpretive paradigm, Ryan regards parades in 19th-century America as expressions of the contemporary social structure or representations of society that functioned not only within a structural framework, but also reflected, like a mirror, the underlying principles of the social order. Historians, she argues, by analyzing these marches, can find formations of class, gender, and race expressed in and through them, just to name the classic categories of social history. While the idea of cultural texts or scripts that are simply ‘read out’ and reveal—to researchers—a secret knowledge about overarching social structures and ideas has great merits for explaining stability and order, it falls short of modeling how these structures evolve, change, fail or even vanish.³⁴ In order to explain these phenomena, scholars from different academic disciplines, ranging from anthropology and ethnology, theater and literary studies to philosophy and gender studies, have suggested adding the concept of ‘performance’ to Geertz’s ideas.

Reminiscing on Aristotle’s deliberations on performance, anthropologist Victor Turner saw the origin of theatrical action and rituals within the

32 Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 412–453; Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 3–30.

33 Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

34 In one of his later essays, Clifford Geertz critically discusses the textual model of culture and tries to tackle the question of performance and change. Clifford Geertz, “Blurred Genres: the Refiguration of Social Thought,” in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 19–35. In 1997, theater scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte observed a ‘performative turn’ in the humanities: Erika Fischer-Lichte, “Vom ‘Text’ zur ‘Performance’. Der ‘performative turn’ in den Kulturwissenschaften,” *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* 31, no. 110 (2000), 65–68. Dwight Conquergood has described this ‘shift’ from an anthropological perspective: Dwight Conquergood, “Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics,” *Communication Monographs* 58 (1991), 179–194; Dwight Conquergood, “Lethal Theatre: Performance, Punishment, and the Death Penalty,” *Theatre Journal* 54, no. 3 (2002), 339–367.

drama of human social life itself.³⁵ Countering the idea of a static culture model, he focused on the dynamics of production and change within cultures and concluded that “performance is a paradigm of process.”³⁶ In this, he seconded philosopher John L. Austin, who in his *speech act* theory emphasized the force inherent in language.³⁷ Austin used the instance of baptizing to convey his fascination with the fact that a person can perform or at least initiate an action through speaking. He showed that the words “I baptize you,” spoken by a priest or minister, result in the christening of a human being. Thus, he titled his major work “How to do things with words.” Part of his theory involves a distinguishing between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts, which describe different modes of action. Locutionary speech acts are what Austin also called constatives: verbal utterances that merely describe (“It is raining outside.”). Illocutionary utterances perform “in the speech,” such as a baptism or a promise given. As one speaks the words “I promise,” the act comes into being in that very moment of utterance.³⁸ Perlocutionary speech acts, by contrast, initiate an action “through the speech,” although they are often disguised as constatives. For example, the constative sentence “It is raining outside” could extend beyond its descriptive quality to become perlocutionary if the speaker intends it to express a wish for his or her partner to bring an umbrella for the upcoming walk.³⁹ This last type of speech act, in particular, has caught the attention of performance studies scholars.

Very similar to Austin’s speech acts, public rituals and performances reflect not only concepts, ideas and conventions preceding a performance.⁴⁰ In addition to this representational function, they have productive sides, as well. Public rituals and performances are not mere mirrors of society, but,

35 Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: the Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982).

36 Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1995).

37 John Langshaw Austin, *How To Do Things With Words: the William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

38 Literary scholar Shoshona Felman read Austin’s lectures along with Molière’s play *Don Juan* and emphasized the failure that is inherent to the institution of the promise, since its fulfillment and, thus, the ultimate success of the speech act lies in the future. In her opinion, language in general is based upon its failings as well as its successes in conveying meaning. Shoshana Felman, *The Literary Speech Act: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

39 Austin, *How to do things with words*, 52, 76 & 148.

40 Ursula Rao and Klaus-Peter Köpping, eds., *Im Rausch des Rituals: Gestaltung und Transformation der Wirklichkeit in körperlicher Performanz* (Hamburg: LIT, 2000).

at the same time, in the actual moment of their bodily execution, they construct and constitute categories and realities of social (dis-)order.⁴¹ They are instances of both stability and change, of being as well as of becoming. Using Shakespearean language, Austin described these transitions and alterations as ‘sea changes.’ But how can historians profit from these scholarly findings?

To explore this aspect in political history, it might be helpful to undertake a short thought experiment and ask a question that, at the first glance, might sound a little absurd: where is the state? Most people (at least in the Western world) would agree that there is an entity called ‘the state’ and would use it without further reflection, but where can one find this reality of the ‘state’? Although it almost seems too simple and is common-sense knowledge: how do we know or learn of its existence? Does it have a particular place?

The answer is very short and complicated at the same time: ‘the state’ as a phenomenon remains abstract and invisible until it becomes invoked in some form—as historian David Kertzer pointed out in his 1988 book *Rituals, Politics, and Power*.⁴² The political body becomes visible and palpable in every action its representatives—ranging from presidents or politicians in general to police or income tax agents—undertake in its name. In them and through these representatives, people are able to perceive and experience governmental acting, thereby gaining an image of the abstract ‘state.’ The concept of ‘nation’ provides a very similar example of these mechanisms, since nation-building rituals and public performances constitute just this sort of performative construction site that again picks up on the notion of ‘identity.’

If one searches for such sites of identification, inaugurations, demonstrations and parades emerge as theatrical acts that allow actors and audiences to meet for community-building and identification, as opportunities to feel a sense of belonging.⁴³ State ceremonies, such as the inauguration of

41 In the words of Moore and Myerhoff: “Rituals do much more than mirror existing social arrangements and existing modes of thought. They can act to reorganize them or even help to create them.” Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, “Introduction: Secular Ritual—Forms and Meanings,” in *Secular ritual*, ed. Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff (Assen: van Gorcum, 1977), 3–24, esp. 5.

42 Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 6.

43 Christoph Wulf and Jörg Zirfas, “Die performative Bildung von Gemeinschaften: zur Hervorbringung des Sozialen in Ritualen und Ritualisierungen,” *Paragrana* 10, no. 1 (2001), 93–116.

an American president, are not only presentations and visualizations of a political system, but also acts of becoming a community. Ideally, in this case, the president, members of the political establishment and citizens come together to reaffirm or reproduce a national image. Yet one might ask whether the ritual fails if the president-elect falls asleep during his inauguration or the chief justice passes out during the oath of office. In any case, a certain amount of risk is involved in this operation, since the meaning of the event is created in the very moment of the performance. The concept of nation is constantly subject to such acts of remodeling and reaffirmation and, therefore, the nation “lives in so far as it is performed,” to borrow a phrase from anthropologist Victor Turner.⁴⁴

In summary, public performances make power relations visible,⁴⁵ but they represent more than what precedes the moment of their performance. They go beyond a mere reproduction or a replay of such concepts and ideas to produce, reaffirm, renew or contest, and even jeopardize them. Meaning is created in the very moment of the per-*form*-ance, i.e., it gains a palpable form.⁴⁶ Abstract institutions, such as the state, rely on acts of making them visible or even palpable. The methodological potential of performance as a theoretical concept lies in its ability to grasp changes and instabilities as well as to elucidate how certain views and ideologies become stable. Performance studies, therefore, are about *becoming* rather than about *being*. Categories, orders, structures and frameworks of interpretation are unstable, so the concept of “a social vocabulary” Mary Ryan describes not only reflects the textual model of culture but also leaves one central notion

44 “[R]eligion, like art, lives in so far as it is performed, that is, in so far as its rituals are ‘going concerns,’” Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, 49. Numerous studies have pointed out the relevance of performative aspects for the analysis of political history: Beate Binder, Wolfgang Kaschuba, and Peter Niedermüller, eds., *Inszenierung des Nationalen: Geschichte, Kultur und die Politik der Identitäten am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Köln: Böhlau, 2001), Christoph Wulf, “Ritual, Macht und Performanz: die Inauguration des amerikanischen Präsidenten,” in *Die Kultur des Rituals: Inszenierungen, Praktiken, Symbole*, ed. Christoph Wulf (München: Fink, 2004), 49–61; Marion G. Müller, “Die zwei Körper des Präsidenten. Zur Inszenierung politischer Übergänge im amerikanischen Inaugurationszeremoniell,” in *Politische Inszenierung im 20. Jahrhundert: zur Sinnlichkeit der Macht*, ed. Sabine R. Arnold (Köln: Böhlau, 1998) 185–201; Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 6.

45 Herfried Münkler, “Die Visibilität der Macht und die Strategien der Machtvisualisierung,” in *Macht der Öffentlichkeit – Öffentlichkeit der Macht*, ed. Gerhard Göhler (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1995), 213–230.

46 James Vernon, “The Social and Its Forms,” *Representations* 104 (2008), 154–158.