

SYLLABUS
Communication Studies 3041:1
Performance in Everyday Life
Spring 2014
M, W, F 12:30-1:20
Woodin, 248

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*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players . . .*
-- William Shakespeare

Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle.
-- Lewis Carroll

I know what I eat; I know not what I do.
-- Salvador Dali

Course Description:

The view of life as theater is an ancient and enduring metaphor for human reality. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the perspective of life as theater and in performance-centered approaches to communication and culture.

This course focuses on the relationship between everyday life and aesthetic performance. We will explore how communication in everyday life may be understood using performance as a metaphor *and* method of study. We will also look at how aesthetic performances are informed by everyday experiences. We will discuss culture as a continuous performance, from the “ordinary” speech of an individual to the elaborate rituals/practices of groups and organizations. We will look at how these everyday performances construct and maintain culture.

Course Objectives:

After completing this course you should:

1. Have a deeper understanding of the relationship between communication and performance.
2. Be able to use performance as a metaphor when analyzing communicative phenomena.
3. Be able to use performance as a method of gaining insight into the actions of others.
4. Understand the role of performance in the creation and maintenance of culture.
5. Be able to create an aesthetic public performance.
6. Be able to constructively critique the performances of others.

Recommended Prerequisite: CMST 2040: Introduction to Performing Literature

Required Reading:

Bell, Elizabeth. *Theories of Performance*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2008.

Suggested Reading:

Bial, Henry. *The Performance Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

I will also post readings, video, and audio on Moodle during the course of the semester.

Course Requirements:

Each student is responsible for three solo class performances, two group workshops, two group performances, one written analysis, one group evaluation sheet, a discussion grade, and two objective tests: a midterm and final. The final grade will be calculated as follows:

Solo Performance of “The Things I Carry”	25 points
“Certainties, Probabilities, Possibilities, Distortions” Workshop	25 points
Solo Performance of a “Story”	50 points
Group Performance of DIY Ritual	50 points
Group Performance: Public Spectacle	50 points
“Power” Analysis	25 points
Solo Performance: Extracting the Difficult from the Difficult	50 points
Required review of group members	75 points
Outside performance Analysis	50 points
Midterm	100 points
Final	100 points
Discussion Grade	100 points
Total Possible:	700 points

Description of Assignments:

The Things I Carry

Inspired by the introduction to the book *The Things We Carried* by Tim O’Brien, you will present yourself to the class as a collection of things you carry with you on a day-to-day basis. While this performance does not have to be memorized, it does have to be aesthetically interesting. Performances must be between 1-2 minutes. In addition to your performance, you will also turn in your written script of the performance. (Please rehearse and time as everyone will perform on this day.) This will be discussed more in class. Performances begin on Monday, January 27th. Worth 25 points.

Certainties, Probabilities, Possibilities, and Distortions Workshop

In your small groups, you will be asked to create 4 mini performances of the same text (provided) using these concepts. You will share your work with the class on Wednesday, February 5th. Worth 25 points.

Solo Performance of a Story

Inspired by the “Act Out” on p. 91, you will create a two-minute story to be performed in class on Monday, February 24th. Your grade will be determined on how well the story is constructed, presented, and rehearsed. Additionally, it must be clear why this story is a story that you tell time and again. In other words, what is the personal and rhetorical significance of the story for you? Worth 50 points.

Group Performance of DIY Ritual

Inspired by the “Act Out” on p. 130, create a group ritual to share with your discussion group. We participate in rituals every day, so coming up with an idea should not be hard. Your group’s attention to detail will make your performance stand out. How do you get the entire class involved? Is the ritual well-represented? Please take the major roles, the actions, the time, the space, the purpose, the supporting roles, and the props of the ritual into consideration when planning. You’ll be graded on preparedness, enthusiasm for the project, and creativity in addition to how well you orchestrate the event. 10-15 minutes. In-class rehearsal time provided on Friday, February 21st. Performances begin on Monday, February 24th. Worth 50 points.

Group Performance: Public Spectacle

For your second major group performance, you will be organizing a public spectacle to occur some time before Finals Week. As a group you will decide how to stage a flash-mob type performance. Groups can choose to work

together and you will be graded on the following criteria: 1. How well did your group prepare its portion of the event, 2. Was the event highly visible, and 3. Was there some sort of rhetorical significance to the act that was performed? I will give more instruction in class. In-class preparation time for this performance will be given. The performance must be completed by the end of the week of April 25th. Worth 50 points.

Power Analysis

This assignment asks you to identify and critique an instance of power that you witnessed in and/or around the flashmob performance. Choose one example of power and/or resistance that you saw/experienced during the process of the flashmob. Define the moment as power or resistance (drawing on Foucault and/or DeCerteau's conceptions of power/resistance). Then, explain the performative significance of the act through one of the following theories: Carnavalesque, Brechtian epic theater, Boalian theater of the oppressed, making do, poaching. The analysis should be between 0.5 – 1 page. Due on Monday, April 28th. Worth 25 points.

Extracting the Difficult from the Difficult – A performance Experiment

For this, your final performance, you must choose a series of actions that you perform regularly, and with little to no thought. For example, making coffee in the morning, preparing for bed in the evening, or prepping your apron and server book before waiting tables, would all be good choices. Break this action down into its constituent parts. In addition to what is required to complete the task, also note body movements, vocal expressions, costume choices, etc... You will record these into a document titled appropriately (i.e. "How Ari Makes his Coffee in the Morning"). Next, you will teach yourself how to perform the action differently. Your goal in this second performance is to start and end at the same place (i.e. no coffee → coffee!), but have the constituent parts be different. You will then record the constituent parts to your new performance and title this appropriately as well (i.e. "How Ari Could, but Usually Doesn't Make his Coffee in the Morning"). Finally, you will rehearse the heck out of this new script, and present the two different performances to the class in a creative way. There should be no difference in the ease with which you perform the different scripts. Worth 50 points.

Evaluation of Group

You will be asked to complete a confidential evaluation of the other members of your group, assessing how much they contributed to your group's success over the course of the semester. I will average each member's score of you to create your score. Worth 75 points.

Written Analysis

This 3-5 page paper asks you to apply the concepts you are being introduced to in this class to events in the "outside" world. The paper should be "college junior" quality. It should be clear, concise, and concrete. It should provide terms and theories from the course grounded with descriptive examples from the event. It should have an introduction, body, and a conclusion. It should be insightful and imaginative. Please type (12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, 1 inch margins) your paper. Also, make sure to title and staple it. It will be picked up at the beginning of class on the day due.

SPECIFICS: Participate in any public performance event (tailgating, festival, sporting event, etc...). Using the concepts from the class, attempt to answer one or more of these questions (or create your own): How is the event a performance? What values get highlighted in the performance? How would you define the aesthetic versus the mundane in regards to this particular performance? How is the performance "keyed?" Do issues of play come into this performance? How? Does ritual come into play in this performance? You may include additional theories discussed and/or read that you find pertinent. DUE: Monday, April 7th. NOTE: If you don't have the paper at the beginning of class, it is late. If the paper is late, I subtract 10 points a day until I receive it. Worth 50 points.

Midterm and Final

There are two objective tests this semester. Each test is comprised of 50 multiple choice questions. (Please bring a small scantron to class on each test day.) The tests are not cumulative, but focus on each subsection of the class. They are based on the readings, lectures, and exercises done in class. Each is worth 100 points.

Discussion Grade

Clearly, there are a lot of days you need to not only be present, but be "hands on" to help this class reach its potential. I will assign a discussion grade at the end of the semester for each of you. This grade will be determined based on three criteria. 1. Journal Entries – You are expected to write at least 5 entries per week. On some days I will offer you a prompt to write, otherwise you should write about whatever aspect of the class piques your interest.

Grades will be based *more* on quantity than quality, but not completely. 2. Your involvement in class discussions. On occasion, your group will be called upon to present on the readings. Reading presentations should be no longer than 7 minutes and should be creative. This will be impossible to accomplish if you have not given the reading its due consideration. 3. Your involvement in class activities.

Other Information

Please note that performances are due on the day I assign them. If you choose to be absent on a day in which you are scheduled to perform, you will receive a zero for that performance. If you must miss the day when the paper is due, please make sure the paper reaches my hands before the start of that class. As a general policy, I do not give make-up tests. If a make-up is necessary, it will be in essay format. I will not make exceptions to these policies later in the semester.

I will take attendance in this class. While attendance is not a graded part of the class (you should be able to miss 1-3 classes for sickness or emergency without harming your discussion grade), excessive absence will certainly get in the way of a strong group evaluation and your discussion grade.

I ask that you engage this class in a mature way. Attend. Avoid being tardy. Contribute your thoughts and insights. Ask questions. Provide constructive comments for your fellow classmates. Respect diversity and each other. Demonstrate commitment to the goals of this class. Work hard. Turn off electrical devices that might interrupt us. (You will be asked to leave that day if it goes off during class.) Challenge yourselves. Be creative!!!

A HINT: Every professor has at least one pet peeve. I'll share mine. I hate when students are disrespectful to each other or myself. So respect each other. If you have a problem with a fellow classmate, don't let the problem fester. Instead, come speak with me about it. If you have a problem with me, please speak with me about it. If you do not feel comfortable speaking with me, please speak to the chair of my department about it.

In calculating your final grade, I will use the following scale:

700-630 A
629-560 B
559-490 C
489-420 D
420-0 F

Course Schedule Available on Moodle