

CMST 7943: PERFORMANCE AND CULTURE

Spring 2014 9:30-10:50 am Mondays and Wednesdays; 116 Prescott Hall

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Office Hours: M/W 2:00-3:00 pm or by appointment

DESCRIPTION/OBJECTIVES:

“Culture enunciates itself in performance.” -Elin Diamond

Perhaps this is why performance—as ritual, play, process, and intercultural encounter—has long been a privileged object of study for anthropologists. Performance is both a practice and a site where cultural norms as values are maintained, reproduced, and challenged. The politics of performance emerges out of the contingencies and possibilities that arise when and where a particular performance comes up against the cultural conventions framing our interpretations of that event. In that “risky and dangerous negotiation between a doing and a thing done...we have access to cultural meanings and critique” (Diamond 5).

Throughout the semester, we’ll be concerned with issues related to two main themes: (1) *the politics of performance*, and (2) *the problematic of cultural studies*. The politics of performance refers to the interventionist and utopian possibilities of performance to rework the *as-is* into *what if*. Performance provides a means for contesting and reimagining the conditions of possibility under which we live, love, and labor. In this respect, performance holds promise for those concerned with the politics of intellectual work—a problematic articulated most forcefully by Cultural Studies practitioners. According to Lawrence Grossberg, “Cultural Studies is concerned with the role of cultural practices in the construction of the contexts of human life as milieus of power” (257). Consequently, it uses theory to “enable people to act more strategically in ways that change their context for the better” (261).

As a field that specializes in the way people act, performance studies is uniquely poised to offer theoretical insights and methodological tools useful to people wishing to “change their context for the better.” In this seminar, we will concentrate on performance as a subject of cultural research by reviewing the major approaches and sample case studies, and by exploring methodological questions and analytical techniques.

ASSIGNMENTS/RESPONSIBILITIES:

A. Participation (20%): Based on attendance, preparedness, meeting deadlines, involvement in discussions and workshop activities, and short performances and written responses to course readings. If you are curious about how you are doing in the class, please come see me during office hours.

Prompts: Your course schedule includes writing prompts geared toward that week's readings. Prompts are meant to guide your reading and help you prepare for seminar each week. You are expected to write 1 or 2 pages (typed, double-spaced, 12 pt. font). Bring your work to class each week and be prepared to discuss your response with your classmates.

Short Performance: Once during the semester you will present a response to the assigned readings in the form of a very short (2-3 minutes) performance. Your objective for the performance could be as "simple" as representing your understanding of the dramatic "speaker" in the text. However, there are no requirements or expectations for you to do that. You may perform the text in whatever manner you choose. This performance will serve mainly as a pretext for discussing problems and opportunities of using performance as a way of understanding and representing--of addressing and, maybe, of criticizing--research texts.

B. Short Papers (30%): Two times over the course of the semester you will have the opportunity to formalize your response to the reading prompts in the form of a short paper. Both short papers should be approx. 5 pp. (typed, double-space) in length. They will be evaluated on the basis of cogency (sound argumentation), completeness (of thought and assignment), and clarity (grammatical, stylistic, organizational, and typographical). Any notes and/or references should be prepared in accordance with MLA or Chicago style.

C. Research Project (25%): Your major written project for this course is to prepare an analysis of a specific cultural performance, public event, social rite, or performance practice. The central aims of the paper are, first, to elucidate the theatrical underpinnings, the dramaturgical/dramatistic features, or the performance elements in whatever event you choose to study; and, second, to develop a reasoned interpretation of how the theatrical nature of the event and/or the experiential aspects of the performance affect(s) its cultural meaning, form, or function. Finally, your analysis should draw upon one or more of the theoretical approaches that we will be discussing.

The choice of topics is quite broad. Your analysis could be based on participant observation of some (performance) event you will attend or have attended. Some examples: Mardi Gras, political spectacle, courtroom trial, wedding, hospital scene, medical treatment, TV news, initiation or graduation ceremony, religious services, legislative session, press conference, shopping/mall-ing, funeral, dinner party/social

gathering, family reunion, and so on. Or you might focus on the kind of "theatre" that goes on within a specific group or setting: gang, religious group, sorority/fraternity, labor union, business establishment, restaurant, bar, educational institution, museum, amusement park, the French Quarter. Or you might do a historical study, if you are so inclined: the Boston Tea Party, the Rosenberg trial and execution, a Vietnam War demonstration, the Haymarket riot, etc.

The paper should be approx. 10 pp. in length (typed, double-space), plus appropriate end matter (notes, reference list, photos, diagrams, etc.). You will present a brief (10 minutes or so) oral report on your analysis.

D. Performance Project (25%): After completing your initial analysis, each of you will also develop a 10-minute solo performance from or based on your research. Part of the task will involve adapting your research text into a "script" or "translating" your research into a "performance text." Another part of your task is to prepare, rehearse, and present the performance itself. The style and focus of the performance are entirely up to you—though we will be discussing various ways of going about all this. The performance should be considered a culmination of the course, especially as it extends academic work (research, writing) into the realm of praxis or ethical action. Performances will take place on the last day of class. You are welcome to invite people from outside the class to attend. Although we do have to consider practical matters of access and scheduling, we may be able to accommodate those who might wish to give their performance in some other space besides this classroom or the Black Box.

On the date of your performance, you will submit one copy of your "script" or "performance text."

REQUIRED TEXTS:

E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*

M. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

D. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*

J. McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*

Tentative Reading Schedule

January 15 **Performance Studies and the Problematic of Cultural Studies**

January 22 **The Politics of Performance and Intellectual Work**

Conquergood, "Beyond the Text: Toward a Performative Cultural Politics" (M)

Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research" (M)

Prompt#1: If the problematic of cultural studies is the politics of intellectual work, then performance studies offers ways of negotiating this challenge. Drawing upon Dwight Conquergood's description of the field and its work, explain how performance studies understands and negotiates the politics of intellectual work.

January 27 **Social Roles**

Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*

Prompt #2: Explain Goffman's understanding of social roles and their performance. Would you describe his theory of performance in everyday life as sincere or cynical? Finally, what are the implications of his approach to for the study of culture?

January 29 **Social Roles continued**

Kembrew McLeod, "Andy Kaufman's Best Lies," *The Atlantic Monthly* (M)

Screen *Andy Kaufman* interviews his ex-girlfriend and *The Kaufman Lawler Feud*: Ch 1

February 3-5 **Betwixt and Between**

Class will not meet this week.

"Liminality and Communitas," Victor Turner (M)

"Social Dramas and Stories About Them" Turner (M)

“Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, Ritual” Turner (M)

Screen *Jesus Camp*

Prompt #3: Define Victor Turner’s concept of liminality. Do you understand Turner’s concept as a subversive cultural force or part of a larger process that ultimately reinforces cultural norms or some combination thereof? Please explain.

Feb 10

Ritual

Bell, “ ‘Performance’ and other Analogies” (M)

Santino, “Performative Commemoratives, the Personal and the Public” (M)

Prompt #4: According to Bell, there are two primary models used to analyze ritual—the first understands ritual as magic and the second assumes it is a form of communication. Locate each of this week’s authors with respect to these two approaches to the study of ritual. What do you perceive as the strengths or weakness of each model?

Feb 12

Ritual continued

Michael Atwood Mason, “ ‘The Blood That Runs Through the Veins’ ” (M)

Obeyesekere, “The significance of performance for its audience” (M)

Screen clip from *Into Great Silence*

February 17

Play

Huizinga, “The Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon” (M)

Bateson, “A Theory of Play and Fantasy” (M)

Prompt #5: Each author makes the case that play, if not serious, is something that should be taken seriously. Briefly rehearse each author’s argument for what Victor Turner has called, “the human seriousness of play.”

February 19

Play continued

Winnicott, "Playing: A Theoretical Statement" (M)

"Playing: Creative Activity and the Search for the Self" (M)

"The Place Where We Live" (M)

February 24

Everyday Life

De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Prompt # 6: Rehearse De Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics. Given this, what is the range of possibilities for resistance within everyday life? Provide examples. Does DC's spatial understanding of power limit or enable resistance?

February 26

Everyday Life continued

Movement Maps Cara Spooner

Screen clips from *The Cruise*

MARDI GRAS

March 10

Performativity

J.L. Austin, "How To Do Things with Words" (M)

Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context" (M)

Prompt #7: What is the difference between performance and performativity? How do theories of performativity challenge Goffman's understanding of subjectivity and social identity?

March 12

Performativity continued

Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (M)

"Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (M)

Sedgwick and Parker, "Introduction: Performativity and Performance" (M)

Screen clips from *Paris is Burning*

March 17

Global and Intercultural Performance

Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance” (M)

Taussig, “Sympathetic Magic in a Post-Colonial Age” (M)

Prompt #8: Of the postcolonial theorists that we read for this week, whose work do you find most compelling and/or useful and why? Please make your case by demonstrating the theory's applicability.

Screen *The Couple in the Cage* Trailer

March 19

Global and Intercultural Performance continued

Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man” & “The Other Question” (M)

Screen *On Global Memory: Thoughts on Barbaric Transmission*

March 24

Intercultural Performance Reconsidered

Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*

Prompt #9: In your response papers for next week please explain Taylor's archive repertoire distinction. Then, choose one of the subsequent chapters of her book to focus your discussion of this distinction. In other words, how are her case studies informed by this distinction? What becomes possible as a result?

March 26

Memory and the Archive in Digital Age

Screen: *SAVE as: Memory and the Archive in the Age of Digital Technologies*

March 31

The Performativity of Power

Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else*

Prompt #10: Describe McKenzie's performance studies intervention and rehearse his theory of the liminal-norm. How,

precisely, does he move us in a new or different direction? You may want to answer this last question by reference to his methodological approach, the book's organization, or to a few of McKenzie's key concepts.

April 2

The Performativity of Power continued

Gómez-Peña, "Culturas-in-extremis: Performing against the cultural backdrop of the mainstream bizarre" (M)

Screen *Instant Identity Ritual, No Thanksgiving, and A Muerte*

April 7

State Performances:

Performing Violence, Producing

Enemies

Ngugi wa Thiong'o "Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space" (M)

Jon McKenzie, "Abu Ghraib and the Society of the Spectacle of the Scaffold" (M)

Anne McClintock, "Paranoid Empire: Specters from Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib" (M)

Prompt #12: Using performance as a lens with which to study culture raises the question: What is not a performance? In this assignment, you are asked to designate what you take to be the outer limits of the performance-as approach.

Screen clips from *Standard Operating Procedure*

April 9

State Performances continued:

Rehearsing for Emergency, Performing Risk Management

T. Davis, *Stages of Emergency*, Introduction (M)

Hall, *The Transparent Traveler*, "Introduction: Rethinking Asymmetrical Transparency: Risk Management, the Aesthetics of Transparency, and the Global Politics of Mobility" (M)

Screen *Man on Wire*

SPRING BREAK

April 21-23 **Research projects and oral reports**

April 28-30 **Final Performances**