

Department of Communication Studies
CMST 7940: PERFORMANCE METHODS AND THEORIES
 Spring 2017, TU 3-6, 137 Coates Hall

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this seminar, we will undertake a practical survey of theatre and performance methods (practices and processes) developed by western practitioners in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The aims of the survey are four. First, it acquaints students with methods they can use and experiment with in their creative research and in teaching their courses. Second, it encourages students to engage the theories and concepts (regarding art, science, nature, text, performer, audience, body . . .) embedded in each method, comparing them with each other and with other pertinent ideas. Third, it tests concepts and practices through bodies doing things in space – i.e., a key characteristic and concern of performance studies. Fourth, in these ways, it is hoped that students gain an understanding of the poetics and politics, drawbacks and possibilities of the methods, both enjoying and holding themselves accountable for their application in class and in the future.

To meet these aims, I divided the course into six sections, each of which features a particular method with many diverse trajectories (for instance, Stanislavski’s system is situated in a network of theories and practices that include mimesis, naturalism, psychological realism, oral interpretation, everyday life performance, autoperformance). For each section, I will take a full class period to introduce the method, leading the class in discussion and exercises that highlight certain aspects of the method. My address will be informed by questions (of confusion or interest) students submit prior to class, and the exercise phase will include one or two students leading a short exercise of their own. In the weeks that follow, students will study the method or related methods more fully via a round-robin format of assignments.

First, each student will select a particular method we have studied or one related to it, and write and teach a performance assignment that another student or students can do. Second, each student will develop and present at least two performances that address two of the assignments taught in class. Third, each student will prepare a critical response to one of the performances we see in class, presenting the response orally as well as completing a written version. To conclude the course, students will write a final exam to insure they are conversant in all the methods we undertake in class.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Write & teach a performance assignment	25%
Write & teach a practical exercise	5%
Develop & present two performances	25%
Generate oral & written responses to a performance	25%
Write a final exam	20%

DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENTS

Write & Teach a Performance Assignment (25%)

This requirement asks you to select one of the instigating methods and develop a performance lesson and assignment that features key components of said method or a related method, practice, or process.

For instance, in Section B, we will take a look at Meyerhold’s elements of theatricality as he realized them in stylized theatre. The elements include a recognition of artifice or the “double-

life” of performance as realized through mask, trickery, and the grotesque; a synthesized or distilled style; visual and popular culture appeal; physicality, rhythmic discipline, and improvisation. Now, a student might develop and teach a performance assignment that focuses directly on Meyerhold’s components – say, of physicality, rhythmic discipline, and improvisation – or she might select a different practice that features similar components, as is the case with *commedia dell’arte* and many contemporary practices aligned with “physical theatre.”

The idea and ideal, then, is for you to identify what intrigues you about a particular method and to activate that intrigue by featuring it in your lesson and assignment. In this way, you are encouraged to connect, extend, test, and challenge key components associated with a method(s) rather than reproduce what we already know or think we know.

You will have 75 minutes to present your lesson and assignment in class. For approximately half that time, I will expect you to explain your interest; articulate the theoretical-conceptual and practical connections between it and the instigating method; explain the assignment clearly; field questions; and, as necessary, make adjustments to the assignment. The other half of your lesson should be devoted to active exercises, games, or improvisations that help us further access and understand your assignment. Your organization and delivery of the noted material should demonstrate careful thought and preparation. Although you may refer to your written handout, please do not teach by reading aloud from the page.

A handout detailing the assignment is due to all seminar members the day before you present it in class. The handout should run between 6 and 8 (single-space, typed) pages and include:

- (a) An ample introduction in which you identify your interest and articulate the connections between it and the base method. An appropriate draw on readings I required (initially) and you required for your lesson is expected.
- (b) A clear and thorough description of the assignment that details what you are asking the performer to do; how he should or might process the assignment; what aspects are required as compared to optional; helpful examples; and why the assignment is worth doing. What is the point or broader significance?
- (c) A list of criteria or questions you, the teacher, would use (and I will use) to grade the performance.
- (d) A concise and clear explanation and description of the exercises, games, or improvisations you plan to do. See the following section on writing and presenting a practical exercise.
- (e) A “References” or “Works Cited” and, as appropriate, “Suggested Readings” page.

The handout should be written as thoroughly and carefully as you would a paper for any seminar. Assume little; engage the reader through a thoughtful organization of points and accessible language; and cite your sources.

As regards the assignment proper, it should be written for both a solo performer and a director-composer conceiving of and staging a piece for two or more performers. The required length of the performance should be 10-15 minutes, and, in concept and practice, it should be challenging to graduate students – i.e., worth 20% of their grade.

Given the assignment you write, your role as a teacher may entail meeting with the performer or director outside of class to process or “workshop” the assignment with him or her. The amount, length, and substance of the meetings will depend on the particular method and assignment, I suspect. Whatever the case, your job here is not to make choices for the performer or director, but rather to discuss concepts, work exercises, or respond to choices they have already made.

Lastly, given your focus, you may require the class to review prior readings and/or read new material. Please inform us of the requirement and post any new readings on moodle a week before you teach your lesson.

Write & Teach a Practical Exercise (5%)

This requirement asks you to design, write out, and teach an exercise, game, or improvisation that addresses a conceptual or practical aspect of one of the base methods we cover together in class. You will be assigned this method, and it will be different from the method you address in the prior assignment.

The exercise you develop should run between 8-10 minutes. You may invent the exercise from scratch or adapt an exercise you find in the course readings or elsewhere. The exercise should be designed so that all the seminar members can participate equally. It should be active and feature the physical body although you may include other media too. It may function in a largely descriptive, interpretive, evaluative, or theoretical way. Just about “anything goes” then as long as the exercise activates the body in *doing* something, and it relates to the method in some way, enhancing our experiential knowledge and understanding of it.

The written handout should run approximately one (single space, typed) page and include a title; a clear description of how to do the exercise; and a statement in which you identify and support how the exercise pertains to the method, and what you see as its purpose or aim. “Support” can be demonstrated by using the language of the method (terms and so forth) and referencing appropriate sections in the course texts.

You will earn full credit for the exercise as long as you complete it, on time, and it fulfills the criteria I outlined above.

Develop & Present Two Performances (25%)

For this requirement, you are asked to develop and present 2 performances (what you might understand as a major and minor performance) that address assignments taught by two of your classmates. While specific expectations will vary from assignment to assignment, all the assignments will require a performance of 10-15 minutes and, in concept and practice, be challenging to graduate students. They also will be written to be completed by a solo performer and a director-composer who conceives of and stages a piece for two or more performers. There are options, then, as regards how you fulfill this/my general requirement. They are:

Option A: you may develop and perform a solo piece (your major performance worth 20%) & perform in another piece directed by a classmate (a minor performance worth 5%)

Option B: you may conceive of and direct at least two others in a group piece (your major performance worth 20%) and perform in another piece directed by a classmate (your minor performance worth 5%)

If all or most of the class selects Option A, we might have to adjust things a bit. We’ll see.

For your major performance, you will have some choice regarding the method on which your performance is based, and you should have 3-5 weeks to prepare it.

Allow me assure any “non-performers” that, in my experience teaching this course, a student’s relative lack of experience rarely plays out in any discernible way. You will do fine on the assignment given your interest, thoughtful application, and consistent rehearsal.

Generate Oral & Written Responses to a Performance (25%)

For this assignment, you will select or be assigned one of the major performances we see in class. A week after the performance is presented, you will provide an oral response and lead a discussion regarding it. A week later, a written version of your response will be due to the entire class. The oral response will count for 10% of your total grade and the written essay, 15%.

I will expect the oral response to run about 10-15 minutes, and the discussion, about the same. Your response should be extremely well organized and prepared, so as to provide a good bit of substantive insight in a short amount of time. It also should inform the questions you ask to provoke discussion. Said questions should be emailed to your classmates the day before you present your response.

The written version of the response should run about 10 (double-spaced, typed) pages, not including end- or footnotes and a “Works Cited” or “References” page.

Both the oral and written response should address (in varying degrees) the four main components of an informed critical pursuit, namely, description, interpretation, evaluation, and theorization. As applied to this assignment, you’ll want to describe what happened in the performance – on stage and to you, experientially. Drawing on discourses associated with the method and perhaps others you select, you’ll proceed to ask what sense or meanings you made from what happened. Given your understanding, you might query whether the performance met the aims of the assignment and broader method or you might ask whether, in your opinion, it is a practice “worth” doing. And, lastly, you’ll want to address what we learn about performance or art or culture, bodies, texts, or identities . . . broader issues and concerns by processing them through practical performance. In other words, when we theorize we aim to context and discuss the subject in a broader network of theoretical or methodological concerns. Whatever particular tact you take on the performance, I will expect you to demonstrate your understanding of the base method, speak to the teacher’s interests, and entertain with care and respect the performer’s choices and views.

Write a Final Exam (20%)

The final exam will be a 2 hour open book take home exam that runs from 3-5 p.m. on Monday, May 7. The exam will consist of an essay question and a series of short answer questions that test you on key terms associated with the various methods. The essay question is designed to prepare you for the kinds of questions you will address on your (CMST) comprehensive or general exam. Typically, the questions ask you to demonstrate your understanding of a theory or method by summarizing its key components. Often, you are asked to compare and contrast theories or methods. Usually an application section follows where you show your understanding of the theory or method by using it – e.g., to discuss specific examples or case studies. To conclude, many questions ask you to broaden the scope of your address by discussing the significance of the theory or method to the discipline or field, or to theorize connective links of your own. The factors of evaluation then tend toward substantive accuracy, comprehension through specific application, theoretical insight, and a concise manner of address.

GRADING

In my description of the assignments, I believe my grading criteria are clear. Please note that the highest grade you can earn for a late assignment is a “D” – although I will not give or accept a late final exam. For some of the assignments, you will receive an additional handout in which I explain things more thoroughly than I do here. Should you ever have questions regarding your grade or grading generally, please don’t hesitate to ask me.

The grading scale for this course is: 95 or above = A; 92-94=A-; 89-91 = B+; 85-88=B; 82-83=B-; 79-81= C+ 75-78=C; 72-74= C-; 69–71=D+; 66-68=D; 64-65= D-; 63 or below = F

The Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see a Coordinator in the Office for Disability Affairs so that such accommodations may be arranged. After you receive your accommodation letters, please meet with me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations during the first two weeks of class.

LIST OF METHODS

Below is a list of methods I've defined briefly and categorized. The list is partial, offering a fairly canonical view of western theatre and performance practices. Over the course of the list, I identify the methods we *will* or *might* undertake as a group in each of the course sections. That is, for Sections A, B, and C, I am fairly set on the methods that will instigate our study, whereas for Sections D & E, I am more flexible. As I hope is clear from my description of your first assignment (above), you may opt to teach a lesson that features the instigating method or you may focus on a related method, listed here or not.

A- METHODS THAT HIGHLIGHT MIMESIS, REPRESENTATIONAL REALISM, AND/OR ARE CENTERED IN THE LITERARY TEXT

Stanislavski's system which we will undertake in Section A

an actor training system grounded in the analysis of the literary (dramatic) text or, more precisely, "character"; based on concepts of Nature; with an emphasis on activating the internal truth of the character-performer-individual over and often in conflict with external systems and transactions; although external training (and action) is paramount to the system too.

Some extensions & connections: Strasberg's "method," a U.S. version of Stanislavski's system. See Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method*. For variations, see Adler, Hagen, Krause, and Meisner. For practices that aim to represent the sub- and unconscious in material form, see the Surrealists . . . to start – e.g., Breton, Tzara, and Picabia, who in turn influenced Artaud who in turn influenced Grotowski, et al.

Oral Interpretation -- the performance of literature

at its height, a modernist, new critical grounding in the analysis and (re)presentation of the literary text; as with its elocutionary cousin, influenced by U.S. pragmatism – i.e., performing literature is "good for you."

For oral interpretation (readers theatre & chamber theatre) textbooks, see Bacon, Breen, Coger & White, Gray & VanOosting, Lee & Gura, Long & HopKins, Pelias & Stephenson-Shaffer, and Yordon to start. Also see "traditional" histories of oral interpretation where diverse practices are embedded – e.g., Bahn & Bahn, Haas & Williams, Taft-Kaufman, & Thompson. For an excellent critical study of the elocution → oral interpretation → performance studies trajectory, see Paul Edwards, *Unstoried: Teaching Literature in the Age of Performance Studies*.

(Some) Autoperformance

one of the most common forms of performance occurring around the world in the past 20-30 years; a form in which a single individual serves as the author-director-protagonist-performer of the piece, which then alludes to another common artistic genre, autobiography. The autoperformance range is huge, and it connects variously with the categories noted above and below. As regards the above-noted category, I intend the connection via autoperformance methods that feature literary texts (often written by the performer) as well as other materials, many of which highlight personal memories, stories, thoughts, and feelings. See, for instance, the mystery as conceived by Gregory Ulmer and applied to performance by Bowman & Bowman.

Everyday life based practices

current popularity in the academy and performance art circles is influenced by the decline of the literary canon and the emergence of the canon of post-structural theories; an anthro-ethno-performance studies integration; aspects of which have been appropriated by popular culture, particularly the commercial media – e.g., in TV talk and reality shows.

Some extensions & connections: For studies of personal narratives, see Langellier, Bauman, Clifford, & Labov. For E.L.P. or Everyday Life Performance or Replication of Life, see Stucky for theory and Anna Deveare Smith for applied practice. Also consider historical re-enactments, living history events, documentaries, Happenings . . .

B- METHODS OF (EXPLICIT) CRITICAL DECONSTRUCTION

these are anti-illusionist practices that aim to show how things are constructed by people (their actions, discourses, institutions) for particular reasons; they don't "just happen." As practices that show rather than elide modes of production, deconstruction practices imply a Marxist bent although they have been called on to serve diverse critical-political agendas; in many cases, the main aim of the practice is to urge or provoke audiences toward critical inquiry rather than ideological acceptance.

Meyerhold's stylized theatre & biomechanics, which we will undertake in Section B

composition staging practices informed by the (perceived) "laws of theatricality," which include a recognition of artifice or the "double-life" of performance as realized through mask, trickery, and the grotesque; a synthesized or distilled style; a visual appeal; a popular culture appeal; physicality, rhythmic discipline, & improvisation.

Influenced by components of stylization, Taylorism, reflexology, and Constructivism, biomechanics are actor training exercises that contain the fundamentals of all movement and aim to increase the physical expressiveness of the body.

Extensions & connections are vast, ranging from practices of avant-garde or Asian based minimalism; to the literary or social grotesque; to physical theatre (see, for instance, Bausch, Mnouchkine, Dario Fo, Lecoq, Decroux, Bogart, Goat Island, Littlewood); to popular culture practices, such as *commedia dell'arte*, puppetry, the music hall and circus.

Brecht's epic, *Lehrstück*, and dialectical theatre practices, which we will undertake in Section C

influenced by Marx of course and Meyerhold among others; in fairly constant collaboration with Piscator and the literary-cultural critic, Walter Benjamin; developed theories and practices for composing and staging texts aimed at activating the critical-political acumen of the audience regarding their social-historical reality; epic theatre activates the politics of narrative; dialectical theatre, the social reality of contradiction; and, as learning-teaching plays, *Lehrstück* (theoretically) eliminated the audience and asked all participants "to act"; to take active part in what were often plays of debate.

Some extensions & connections: political clowning (e.g., from satyr plays to the Yes Men); Federal Theatre Project's living newspapers; agitprop & workers' theatres; guerilla theatre; Boal's joker system & spect-actor methods

Boal's joker system & spect-actor methods, which we will undertake near the end of the course, and I will teach currently

in addition to Brecht, greatly influenced by Stanislavski and Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and theorist of democratic pedagogy (see Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*); although Boal's practices range in their specific aim, a recurring feature is to use interactive practices to teach people they can act, they can take action on stage and in their everyday lives; he often refers to his practices as "rehearsals for living"; as such, most of his methods eliminate the audience/performer distinction and activate the participants as mutual "spect-actors." The joker system is an extremely accessible, collaborative method for composing and staging any text(s); it draws on and activates many of Brecht's aims in broad, explicit terms – e.g., a "joker" often interrupts the action and interacts with the audience via interviews and "Q&A," making them co-participants-producers of the performance and hence responsible for it and the social reality it may (re)present.

Some extensions & connections: For theatre-therapy practices, see Jacob Moreno. For personal narrative reenactments, see Jo Salas, *Improvising Real Life: Personal Story in Playback Theatre*. For interactive theatre-in-education & in-the-

community, see Jackson, *Learning through Theatre*, and Koppers, *Community Performance*. For a more analytical approach to interactive processes, see Barndt, *Naming the Moment: Political Analysis for Action—A Manual for Community Groups*.

C- RITUAL OR ELEMENTAL BASED METHODS

some of these practices are geared toward a de-ritualizing function – i.e., activating the anti-structure of/in ritual structure; and/or they are grounded in a belief that there is some sort of essential, elemental, universal, or archetypal base that (a) links all humanity and (b) escapes the confines of language – i.e., as that which constructs reality.

Grotowski’s Laboratory Theatre practices, which we could undertake in Section D (an option)

based in and aimed at the expression of raw archetypal myths, emotions, and experiences by the performers or “holy actors,” who reach this expressive state via highly disciplined corporeal training aimed at eradicating psychological-physical “blocks” (obtained through socialization); a messianic vision of theatre-performance. For ritual-performance theory, see Victor Turner and Richard Schechner. For influences & variations, see Artaud, Bogart, Brook, Beck, Barba, Hijikata, Kantor, and Suzuki. Also see performance artists, such as Burden, Finlay, and Gomez-Pena.

Barba’s Theatre Anthropology or “the study of the pre-expressive behavior of the human being in an organized performance situation” (*Paper Canoe 10*), which we could undertake in Section D (on option)

trained with and influenced by Grotowski; also influenced by Meyerhold, Craig, Copeau, Artaud, Brecht, and diverse “northpole” and “southpole” (codified and not) performance practices; TI is the study of the performer for the performer by the performer and the practical research is guided by the theory that across cultures or, trans-culturally, performers share certain elemental traits or principles – e.g., alteration in balance; opposition; omission; equivalence; extra-energy. At Barba’s Odin Teatret, actors train and individualize this approach and the company makes performances based on their explorations; Barba also founded ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology), one practice of which is for distinct cultures to exchange or “barter” performance practices.

METHODS OF VISUAL AND/OR PHYSICAL EMPHASIS AND AFFECT

The Bauhaus School, which we could undertake in Section E (an option)

visual design practices based in and aimed at experimentation with elemental (nature based) forms to which (so it is theorized) all humans respond similarly: we make primary associations first and then move to secondary or culture-based associations; in their design and crafting of buildings, furniture, household items, the Bauhaus aimed to fuse these elemental or abstract forms with technological advancements (e.g., in materials, production systems), so as to offer more people more pleasing environments in which to live and work: a social-ized vision of art & technology; the school was well known for its use of live performance to investigate the principles and properties of formal aesthetics and tech-advanced materials. See Gropius & Wensinger, eds., *The Theater of the Bauhaus*; Whitford, *Bauhaus*; Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*; and Flanagan, “The Bauhaus (Per)Forms.”

Some extensions & connections: art-tech fusions generally, many with different theoretical orientations and aims than those of the Bauhaus, such as the Italian Futurists, Cage, Cunningham, Anderson, Wilson, and . . . Bogart.

Bogart’s viewpoints, which we could undertake in Section E (on option)

based largely in the principles and properties of visual composition, viewpoints is “a philosophy translated into a technique” for training performers, building ensemble and creating stage movement” efficiently (*Viewpoints Book 7*); the term “viewpoints” implies points of (physical-sensory) awareness a performer, director, et al., can variously emphasize and combine so as to realize multiple ways action might be composed; there are viewpoints of time (e.g., tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition), space (e.g., space, gesture, architecture, spatial relationship, and topography), and voice (e.g., pitch, dynamic, tempo, timbre, silence . . .).

Theatre of images – the example of Robert Wilson – which we could undertake in Section E (an

option)

“theatre of images” is a catchall term coined by Bonnie Maranca in 1976, to describe “post-literate” postmodern theatre compositions that use words minimally, opting instead for “aural, visual and verbal imagery that calls for [and excites] alternative modes of perception on the part of the audience” (“Introduction to the Theatre of Images” 10); conventions and effects include the use of montage, collage, tableau, and bricolage (e.g., of other cultural genres and forms, such as sculpture, cinema, dance, TV, pop icons), the explicit use of multi-media, viewing/using performers as media (rather than character), stressing painterly-sculptural qualities, and creating alternative time-space realities (e.g., fantasy, dream, nightmare realities). Wilson’s work in particular bears influences of Wagner, Freud’s dream-work as manifested in surrealism, Kandinsky’s whimsical abstract compositions, Cage’s chance methods, Happenings and installations, popular culture practices, and the work of theatre companies such as the San Francisco Mime Troupe and The Bread and Puppet Theatre.

Also see Meyerhold, Grotowski, & Barba above; Murray & Keefe, *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction*; and Murray & Keefe, eds., *Physical Theatres, A Critical Reader*.

REGARDING THE OPTIONS

To get the course underway, we need to make decisions regarding the many options that arise in light of the course design. In sum:

- a) As a group, we need to decide the instigating methods for sections D and E
- b) As a group, we need to decide how rigid or flexible to make the performance requirements
- c) As a group, we should decide whether we want a collective choice or individual choices for the material people use in their performances
- d) As a group, we need to decide when each student will present their “extra” (5%) exercise
- e) Each student needs to decide and rank their preferences for the methods they want to teach, perform, and critique
- f) Each student needs to decide which performance option they would like to do

To address points (e) & (f) above, please email me your responses to the following inquiries by **noon next Tuesday, January 24**. My email address is davidterry@lsu.edu. Thanks.

Your name, email address, and a phone number where your classmates can reach you.

Write an elevator pitch: single paragraph description of a performance project or ongoing research project to which you will apply your work this semester.

List and prioritize at least 4 (instigating) methods you are interested in teaching. If you know of a specific focus you would like to feature, please note that too.

List and prioritize at least 4 (instigating) methods you are interested in performing. They may be the same as those you listed above.

List and prioritize at least 4 (instigating) methods you are interested in responding to. They may be the same as those you listed above.

List any methods you are not interested in teaching or performing.

For the performance requirement, do you want to do Option A or Option B?