

THEA 0505: Enjoying Performances

Fall 2019; M/W 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM

Location: Cathedral of Learning 221

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Cathedral of Learning 1626

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Cathedral of Learning 1610/1611

Course Description

We are always and everywhere performing. We produce plays and inhabit other places and times. We participate in religious rituals. We occupy public and virtual spaces to protest political injustice. We invest significant time, labor, and energy in managing our social identities. And when we work – if we work – we receive performance reviews. This course engages performance as lens for exploring embodiment, representation, identity, and history. Drawing upon the breadth and depth of performance studies as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry over the past half-century, this course will introduce students to performance as both a subject and method of humanistic inquiry. Through lectures, discussions, and performance analysis exercises we will explore what a performance studies perspective enables us to understand anew.

Course Objectives

Students will gain:

- A critical understanding of “performance” as an interdisciplinary lens for examining a wide range of embodied practices
- An overview of the historical and theoretical development of “performance studies” as a field
- Increased facility with performance analysis and textual analysis
- The ability to communicate these understandings in written, spoken, and embodied forms

Required Texts

- Schechner, Richard and Sara Brady, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, third edition; Available for free via the Pitt Library system:
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pitt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1128311>

- Please note that if you choose to access it electronically, you must be proactive and persistent about accessing/downloading reading materials, as the system only supports SIX readers at a time.
- Drury, Jackie Sibblies, *Fairview*
- Films and Television Episodes: *Nanette*, *Homecoming* or *Lemonade*, *The Truman Show*, *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Democratic Primary Debate (some of which must be accessed through pay walls such as Netflix, iTunes, YouTube, etc.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Careful, insightful reading or viewing of assigned articles, plays, and films in preparation for class each day.
2. Active, thoughtful and intensive participation in class discussions and projects.
3. Two theatre critiques, three pages each.
4. Two autoethnographies, three pages each.
5. Either a final exam or Happening.

Participation:

A great deal of the learning in this course takes place in the classroom. To participate effectively, you must be present and on time for class. Be advised, however, that participation is more than simply showing up for class. To receive full credit for participation, you must be prepared to engage in classroom discussions, share your work, and show knowledge of the readings.

Attendance:

- Attendance MATTERS in this course! Being absent will affect your participation grade and will make it difficult for you to keep up with assignments. You are allowed two absences throughout the semester, which can be used for whatever purpose.
- Please let me know if you must miss class due to illness, travel issues, family commitments, religious observance, etc. Absences for legitimate reasons are understandable, but I must be notified IN ADVANCE, and more than two absences will lower your final grade. If there are extenuating circumstances, please discuss them with me and we can try to make arrangements for you.
- Your success in this course will depend on your engaged participation in class. Our discussions will be based on assigned readings, so it is crucial that you keep pace with assignments and prepare material for the day it is assigned.
- Regular and respectful contributions to our ongoing exploration of theatre are an essential part of this class.

Inclusivity and Engagement:

Our goal is to collaboratively construct a class environment that fosters intellectual

exploration and expression. We will be exploring material in this course that may include language or subject matter that is particularly emotionally charged, difficult, upsetting, or traumatic for members of the class. I ask that you be sensitive to yourself and your classmates. I also recognize that the nature of some of our material has the potential to cause individuals to relive traumatic experiences. Please see me if you experience apprehension about approaching particular readings, assignments, viewings, or discussions that stem from this concern.

Every student in this class will be valued and respected as an individual with distinct experiences, talents, and backgrounds. Students will be treated fairly regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, socio-economic status, or national identity. Issues of diversity will be an integral part of our class discussions, assigned readings, and assignments. We will approach our work in this course with a shared foundation of respect and a shared responsibility to ensure that an inclusive environment exists for all students. I encourage you to ask questions and/or to state any concerns you have -- either in class for further discussion, or privately with me -- about the sometimes sensitive, uncomfortable stuff that may emerge. If you have any concerns or suggestions for improving the classroom climate, please do not hesitate to speak with me.

Disability Resources:

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-624-3346 (Fax), as early as possible in the term. Disability Resources and Services will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course. For more information, visit www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/drsabout.

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments are due by the start of class on the date stated, unless otherwise specified; they cannot be made up unless there has been an excused absence, upon the discretion of the instructor. For every weekday (not class day) an assignment is late, the grade for the assignment will be reduced by one full letter.

Readings:

There will be reading assigned for most classes, which may encompass passages from the textbook, outside articles, plays, or films. Readings are subject to change at the discretion of the professor, but students will be notified in advance if that is the case. All reading must be completed before the start of class, and students must be able to discuss them in depth!

Current Events:

In groups of two, students will find a recent article (published in the past year) from the internet that speaks to their interests and would ignite conversations related to a broad-spectrum definition of performance. Feel free to pull these off of Facebook or other social media feeds! The article could be a news story ripped from the headlines, an opinion or think piece, or a (reputable) blog post, but it

should be readable in under five minutes (or edited down to such a length). What is a current debate that is important to you, your field, your life?

After selecting an article, each group will come up with a list of three discussion questions prompted by the piece that demonstrates a performance-based analysis of the article. Groups should submit PDFs of both the article and the discussion questions two days before their presentation date (i.e. by 11:59 PM on Saturday or Monday) via email to BOTH rmirsajadi@gmail.com and amg251@pitt.edu.

During the first 15 minutes of each class session, a group will share their article and facilitate a conversation based on their discussion questions. Make sure you think of the article within the context of *performance*. What are its stakes? What is being performed, and by whom? What is the role of audiences in/of the article? Does it involve ritual or play? How does the article engage with notions of performativity? At least one of the discussion questions should explicitly incorporate ideas of performance.

Theatre Critiques: (2 total, 3 pages each)

You will be required to attend performances of two theatrical productions within the Pitt Stages series:

1. *Next to Normal* (Oct. 3-13)
2. *The Wolves* (Nov. 14-24)

After seeing the productions, you will write a three-page (950+ words) paper about each piece, exploring them through a lens of performance studies. How are categories of identity constructed, broken, and performed in the play? What was your experience (and role) as a member of the audience? In what ways did the performance speak to notions of ritual, play, affect, or performativity? How did the sensorial experience of the performance (lights, movement, sound, set) impact your understanding of the play's themes? What do you think the directors and designers were trying to *say*?

The response should NOT be a summary of the plot, what occurred onstage, or a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" judgment. Rather, it should be a thoughtful analysis of both the play and production. The response should be emailed to both rmirsajadi@gmail.com and amg251@pitt.edu within two weeks of attending the production.

For extra credit, you may attend a performance of either play (or both) staged within the Pitt Student Lab series:

1. *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* (Oct. 2-6)
2. *Ordinary Days* (Nov. 20-24)

To receive the extra credit, you should submit a three-page (950+ words) paper on the performance within two weeks of attending the production.

The cost of tickets for all of these productions is covered in your course fee.

After attending the performance, try asking yourself the following questions:

- What was my experience like as an audience member? How were the other audience members engaging with the performance? How was my experience impacted by them?
- Were there elements of the experience that I found particularly ritualistic? What might have been their intent?

- What were my affective responses to the production? How did the theatrical elements (light, sound, music, set, movement, mimesis, etc.) evoke these feelings and emotions?
- How was identity performed onstage? Were there particular moments that spoke to a character's gender, race, sexuality, dis/ability, class, etc.?
- Were there moments when the division between actors and the characters they portrayed broke down? Were there moments when the division between actors and audience broke down?
- Were there elements of the overall event that I might read as part of a performance contract? What did these entail, and to what end?
- What was the overall production trying to *say*, and how was that communicated within its performance?

As you turn this into a paper, we want to see that you:

- Consider what the performance was like as an *experience*. This isn't an exercise in analyzing scripts. If you are interested in the various themes and messages of the production, make sure that you are thinking about how the performance elements contributed to your reading of this, not just the text!
- Engage deeply with the language of performance *studies*. Consider the production outside the lens of "theatre," and broaden your analysis of it to include ideas of performativity, ritual, or semiotics, for instance.

Autoethnographies: (2 total, 3 pages each)

You will be required to attend two non-theatrical events over the course of the semester and then submit a three-page (950+ words) paper about each one, exploring them through a lens of performance ethnography. Acceptable events might include lectures, religious services, community meetings, sporting events, volunteering for a charity, a night out at the club, etc. Feel free to get creative, and if you have any questions about what constitutes an acceptable event, ask the instructor.

In your paper, consider how the event might be read *as performance*. What was the plot, and to what extent was it scripted? Who are the performers, who is the audience, and what are the roles and stakes for each? What part might ritual and play have within the event? How are identities and communities performed within the event, and to what effect?

Each autoethnography should be emailed to both rmirsajadi@gmail.com and amg251@pitt.edu within two weeks of attending the event.

After attending the event, try asking yourself the following questions:

- How was my overall experience? Was it enjoyable? Frustrating? Tense? Exciting? Draining? Inspiring?
- What aspects of the event contributed to these reactions?
- Who was controlling the way the event unfolded, and how?
- Were there scripted, mandatory, or expected elements within the event? Why? What was their intent? Do I think that intent was accomplished?
- How did the "performers" and "audience" interact or feed each other's experience? Were there any ruptures in the cohesion of the experience?

- Were there moments when I found myself having a particular affective response? What contributed to that? How did this response influence my experience of the event?

As you turn this into a paper, we want to see that you:

- Put the “auto” in autoethnography. This is about self-reflection and your *personal* experience of the event. How did it make you feel? Why? What are your lingering thoughts about the experience?
- Engage deeply with a language and analysis of performance. This means we want to see more than you point out who is the audience, who is the performer, and throw in the word “autopoietic.”
- Consider how thinking of the event in terms of performance, ritual, play, and/or performativity deepens your understanding and response to the experience. You are *not* making the argument that one *can* look at the event as a performance, etc. That is a given! But how does this type of frame and analysis change your response to it?

Final Exam or Performance:

Each student will have the option of taking a final exam OR working in a small group to stage a Happening for the class. The final exam will be held in class on Wednesday, December 4, and Happenings will be staged in class on Monday, December 2.

Alongside the actual performance of the Happening, each group as a whole will submit a play-by-play script or score describing the content of their Happening. These should be submitted via email by the start of class on December 2. Then, each group member will submit an individual paper that analyzes the Happening through a lens of performance studies. These papers should be at least 1,000 words in length (3-4 pages) and emailed to the instructors by 11:59 PM on Wednesday, December 4.

Note on Written Assignments:

The theatre critiques, autoethnographies, and any other papers submitted should be 12-point font, Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri, double-spaced, and with one-inch margins all around. These should be emailed to the instructor as .doc or .docx files by 11:59 PM on the day they are due. Plagiarism will not be tolerated, and all instances of this will immediately result in a failing grade for the course.

Grading for Theatre Critiques and Autoethnographies:

Argument: 30 points

- Are you taking a stance and asserting your interpretation of the overall event as the expert?
- Is the argument that you make more or less valid?
- Does the argument involve a consideration of the event as a performance?

Support: 30 points

- Do you bring up specific details from the event?
- Do you synthesize these details and show how they bolster your argument?
- Are you considering these various elements as moments or pieces of performance?

Organization: 20 points

- Does the overall structure of the paper make sense?

- Is there a logical flow to the ideas that supports your argument?

Clarity: 20 points

- Is the language that you use coherent?
- Are there excessive spelling and grammar mistakes?
- Do you vary your word choice and sentence structures?

TOTAL: 100 points

GRADING

Participation (attendance, effort, and involvement)	20%
Current Event	10%
Theatre Critiques	20%
Autoethnographies	20%
Final Exam or Performance	30%

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION AND KEY CONCEPTS

Monday, August 26	Introductions and Overviews
Wednesday, August 28	What is Performance Studies? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • READ: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Performance Studies" (Blackboard)

WEEK 2: SEMIOTICS OF PERFORMANCE

Monday, September 2	NO SCHOOL (Labor Day)
Wednesday, September 4	Deconstructing Theatre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • READ: Fischer-Lichte, excerpts from <i>The Semiotics of the Theater</i> (Blackboard)

WEEK 3: EXPANDING PERFORMANCE

Monday, September 9	What is Performance? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • READ: Schechner, pp. 28-48
Wednesday, September 11	Performance in Everyday Life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • READ: Schechner, pp. 206-218 • IN CLASS: Discussion and example of Current Event assignment

WEEK 4: RITUALS IN/AS PERFORMANCE

Monday, September 16 **Defining Ritual**
• READ: Schechner, pp. 52-71

Wednesday, September 18 **Theatre and Ritual**
• READ: Schechner, pp. 71-88

WEEK 5: SPIRITUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

Monday, September 23 **Religion in Theatre**
• READ: Malekpour, excerpt from *The Islamic Drama* (Blackboard)

Wednesday, September 25 **Religion as Theatre**
• READ: Pellegrini, "'Signaling through the flames': Hell House Performance and Structures of Religious Feeling" (Blackboard)

WEEK 6: PLAYING AND PERFORMATIVITY

Monday, September 30 **Playing with the Pieces**
• READ: Schechner, pp. 89-104, 118-121

Wednesday, October 2 **What is Performativity?**
• READ: Schechner, pp. 123-133
• READ: Austin, "Lecture II" of *How to Do Things with Words* (Blackboard)

WEEK 7: MEANINGS AND THEIR ABSENCE

Monday, October 7 **Words, Images, Identities**
• READ: Butler, "We the People – Thoughts on Freedom of Assembly" (Blackboard)

Wednesday, October 9 **Deconstruction and Simulation**
• READ: Schechner, pp. 133-150
• WATCH: *The Truman Show* (pay wall: YouTube, Amazon Prime, or iTunes)

WEEK 8: THEATRE THROUGH A PERFORMANCE LENS

Monday, October 14 **Talking Theatre**
• READ: Schechner, pp. 176-192, 203-206
• IN CLASS: Discussion of *Next to Normal*

Wednesday, October 16 **Theatrical Potential**
• READ: Dolan, *Utopia in Performance* (Blackboard)
• READ: Fischer-Lichte, "Theatre and Identity: Theatre as a Liminal Space" (Blackboard)

WEEK 9: PERFORMING IDENTITY

Monday, October 21 **Happenings and Performance Art**
• READ: Schechner, pp. 158-166

- READ: Kaprow, "Assemblages, Environments, and Happenings" (Blackboard)

Wednesday, October 23

Gender as Quotidian Performance

- READ: Schechner, pp. 151-154
- WATCH: Gadsby, *Nanette* (Netflix)

WEEK 10: CRAFTING IDENTITY

Monday, October 28

Drag and Gender Construction

- READ: Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (Blackboard)
- WATCH: *RuPaul's Drag Race* (VH1)

Wednesday, October 30

Performativity of Race

- READ: Schechner, pp. 154-158
- READ: Young, "The Black Body" (Blackboard)

WEEK 11: THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY

Monday, November 4

Performing Intersectionality

- WATCH: Beyoncé, *Homecoming* (Netflix) or *Lemonade* (iTunes)

Wednesday, November 6

Identity in the Theatre

- READ: Drury, *Fairview*
- READ: P. Carl, "Becoming a White Man in the Theatre" (Blackboard)

WEEK 12: PERFORMING THE POLITICAL

Monday, November 11

Performing the Political Persona

- WATCH: Democratic Primary Debate (YouTube)

Wednesday, November 13

Choreographies of Protest

- READ: Foster, "Choreographies of Protest" (Blackboard)
- READ: Kedhar, "'Hands Up! Don't Shoot!': Gesture, Choreography, and Protest in Ferguson" (Blackboard)

WEEK 13: SPORTS AND PERFORMANCE

Monday, November 18

Sports in/as Performance

- IN CLASS: Discussion of *The Wolves*

Wednesday, November 20

Reading the Political in Sports

- READ: Montez, "NFL Activism and Protest in the Age of Trump" (Blackboard)

NO SCHOOL NOVEMBER 25-29 (THANKSGIVING)

WEEK 14: PERFORMANCE APPLICATIONS

Monday, December 2

Happenings

- IN CLASS: Final Performances

Wednesday, December 4

Final Exam

- IN CLASS: Final Exam