

THE 212 – 301: Introduction to Theatre Studies

Spring 2021; M/W 9:40 – 11:10 AM

Location: Zoom

<https://depaul.zoom.us/j/9571071841>

Instructor: Reza Mirsajadi

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Office Hours: M/W 1:00 – 2:30 PM

(Please schedule through <http://calendly.com/rmirsajadi>)

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 a 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

- to develop a critical understanding of “performance” as an interdisciplinary lens for examining a wide range of embodied practices
- to strengthen one’s ability to analyze and create performance, not only as theatre and forms of embodied art, but also in a quotidian sense
- to enrich one’s capacity to speak about performance and to facilitate dialogue on the topic
- to build critical reading skills that assist one’s understanding of the arguments in theoretical texts

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Careful, insightful reading or viewing of assigned performance pieces and articles in preparation for class each day.

2. Active, thoughtful and intensive participation in class discussions and projects.
3. One current event facilitation.
4. One final Happening-style performance.
5. Midterm self-assessment paper (one page).
6. Final self-assessment paper (two pages).

Participation:

A great deal of the learning in this course takes place in the virtual classroom. To participate effectively, you must be present, on time, and engaged in the discussion. If you are in need of asynchronous options for a particular class session, please reach out to me in advance to discuss how you can receive full participation credit without being present on Zoom.

Attendance:

- Attendance MATTERS in this course! Being absent will affect your ability to engage with the course material. Each student is allowed two absences throughout the quarter, which can be used for whatever purpose. If you are planning on using one of your absences for a session, please email me before class to let me know!
- 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 history is an essential part of this class.
- Receiving attendance and participation credit for asynchronous engagement will require prior consultation with the professor.

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 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.

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments are due by the start of class on the date stated, unless otherwise specified. If you are in need of an extension, you must reach out to me in advance to discuss your options. Assignments, participation, and the like will not be assigned letter or number grades in this class. Rather, we will engage in an emerging pedagogical style termed “ungrading,” in which the students establish collective and individual goals, then evaluate themselves based on these benchmarks. We will discuss this further in class!

Readings:

There will be reading assigned for each class, which may encompass sections from the textbook (which is provided on D2L), theoretical texts, viewings of performance art, documentary films, dance, music videos, or other forms of artistic work. The reading/viewing must be completed before the start of class, and students should be able to discuss them in depth and with critical rigor. The readings indicated on this syllabus may change throughout the quarter based on students’ progress and needs, but these changes will be conveyed by the professor at least two days in advance of the session.

Current Events:

At the beginning of the quarter, each student will sign up for a class session to facilitate conversation on a current event of their choice. Each student will find a recent article (published in the past year, roughly) from the internet that speaks to their interests outside of the theatre 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 student 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 rmirsajadi@gmail.com.

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.

Final Performance:

In groups of three, students will create a Happening-style performance that will be conducted over Zoom during our finals slot (**Wednesday, June 9, 8:30 -10:45 AM**). These performances should center

the audience as actors and decision-makers, attempt to creatively engage the digital format, and speak to larger questions about ourselves and the ways we operate individually or in society. Each group will need to submit a single one-page proposal for the idea by **Friday, May 21**, and a beat-by-beat breakdown of what will occur during the Happening by **Monday, May 31**. Groups will receive feedback on their idea and breakdown from the professor. After each Happening performance, the group will facilitate a conversation about what occurred with the rest of the class and ask about its broader implications (these questions should be listed in the beat-by-beat breakdown for approval).

Midterm Self-Assessment:

Each student will submit a one-page, double-spaced self-assessment of their progress so far over the quarter. The self-assessment should:

- 1) Note some of the predominant themes that the student is noticing throughout class conversations and readings
- 2) Honestly articulate how the student feels they are doing in relation to the course goals and objectives that we outline as a class
- 3) Address areas of strength and set concrete goals for their engagement with the class material moving forward in the quarter

The midterm self-assessment should be submitted as a .docx file by 11:59PM on Friday, April 30, via D2L.

Final Self-Assessment:

Each student will submit a two-page, double-spaced self-assessment of their intellectual journey over the course of the entire quarter. This self-assessment should:

- 1) Address which performance piece, reading, or class conversation most excited them during the quarter, and why they found this particular topic so intriguing
- 2) Convey an overarching idea about performance studies that they learned in this course that they will take with them moving forward in their education and careers
- 3) Honestly articulate how the student feels they have performed, both in relation to the course goals and objectives that we outlined as a class, and with respect to the self-assigned goals that they set midterm
- 4) Assign themselves a letter grade, then explain why they should get this grade based on their self-assessment and our collective class criteria.

The final self-assessment should be submitted as a .docx file by 11:59PM on Friday, June 11, via D2L. The professor will take each student's self-assigned grade and explanation into consideration when assigning final grades. That being said, if the professor disagrees with this self-assessment, the professor can adjust a student's grade (higher or lower, accordingly), accompanied by an explanation of justification.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

Monday, March 29

Introductions and Overviews

Wednesday, March 31

What is Performance Studies?

- “What is Performance Studies?” (Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett) (<https://sites.dlib.nyu.edu/hidvl/qz612k86>)
- “What is Performance Studies?” (Daphne Brooks) (<https://sites.dlib.nyu.edu/hidvl/tjq2ch2>)
- Schechner: “What is Performance” (pg 28-36, 45-51)

WEEK 2: THEATRE AS PERFORMANCE

Monday, April 5

The Semiotics of Theatre

- “Performance as Metaphor” (Bert O. States)

Wednesday, April 7

Theatre and Reality

- “Theatre of the Real: An Overview” (Carol Martin)
- PERFORMANCE PIECE: *In and of Itself* (Derek DelGaudio)

WEEK 3: AUDIENCE AND AFFECT

Monday, April 12

Performance as Co-Presence

- DOCUMENTARY: *The Artist is Present* (Marina Abramović)
- “Shared Bodies, Shared Spaces” (Erika Fischer-Lichte)

Wednesday, April 14

Affect, Meaning, and Compassion

- PERFORMANCE LECTURE: “Kinesthetic Empathies & the Politics of Compassion” (Susan Leigh Foster) (<https://sites.dlib.nyu.edu/hidvl/v6wwq38q>) (watch beginning to 32:00)
- *Peculiar Attunements: How Affect Theory Turned Musical* (excerpt) (Roger Matthew Grant)
- “‘Signaling through the Flames’: Hell House Performance and Structures of Religious Felling” (Ann Pellegrini)

WEEK 4: RITUAL AS THEATRE

Monday, April 19

Anthropology and Performance

- Schechner: "Ritual" (pg 52-74)
- PERFORMANCE PIECE: *Rites of Passage/Sacred Spaces* (Lawrence Graham-Brown) (<https://sites.dlib.nyu.edu/hidvl/12jm696n>)

Wednesday, April 21

Performance Studies and Imperialism

- Schechner: "Ritual" (pg 75-88)
- "Is Performance Studies Imperialist?" (Janelle Reinelt)

WEEK 5: UNDERSTANDING PERFORMATIVITY

Monday, April 26

Performativity in Speech

- *How to Do Things with Words* (Lecture II) (J. L. Austin)
- Schechner: "Performativity" (pg 123-141)

Wednesday, April 28

Performativity in Action

Guest Speaker: Coya Paz Brownrigg

- "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (Judith Butler)
- PLAY: *Machos* (Teatro Luna)
- PERFORMANCE CLIPS: "Machos Promo Video" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKsN5Ymp3Z8>)

WEEK 6: PERFORMING GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Monday, May 3

Queer and Trans Temporalities

- "When Elephants are in Must': Peggy Shaw, Acts of Trans/fer, and the Present Future of Queer Desire" (Jaclyn Pryor)
- PERFORMANCE PIECE: *Lesbian National Parks and Services* (<https://sites.dlib.nyu.edu/hidvl/tht76pt8>), *LNP&S: A Force of Nature* (<https://sites.dlib.nyu.edu/hidvl/prr4xp90>) *LNP&S: Endangered Species* (<https://sites.dlib.nyu.edu/hidvl/k0p2nns>)

Wednesday, May 5

Intersectionality and Black Womanhood

- VISUAL ALBUM: *Lemonade* (Beyoncé)
- "The Combahee River Collective Statement"

WEEK 7: PERFORMING RACE

Monday, May 10

Black Performance Theory

- DOCUMENTARY: *Black Is, Black Ain't* (Marlon Riggs)
- "The Black Body" (excerpt) (Harvey Young)

Wednesday, May 12

Critical Whiteness

- *The Limits of Whiteness* (excerpt) (Neda Maghbouleh)
- MUSIC VIDEO: "Moonlight" (Jay-Z)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCSH48OlvMo>)
- TV EPISODE: "B.A.N." (*Atlanta*)

WEEK 8: PERFORMING NATIONHOOD

Monday, May 17

Constructing the State

- "What is a Nation?" (Ernest Renan)
- *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (excerpt) (Judith Butler)

Wednesday, May 19

Neoliberal Rationality and Identity

- PERFORMANCE PIECE: *What Would Jesus Buy?* (Reverend Billy & The Stop-Shopping Choir) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAxuNdtZt7c>)
- "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy" (Wendy Brown)

WEEK 9: PERFORMING PROTEST, ENVISIONING CHANGE

Monday, May 24

Staging Protest

- "Choreographies of Protest" (Susan Leigh Foster)
- "'Hand Up! Don't Shoot!': Gesture, Choreography, and Protest in Ferguson" (Anusha Kedhar)
(<https://thefeministwire.com/2014/10/protest-in-ferguson/>)

Wednesday, May 26

Utopia and the Theatre

- *Utopia in Performance* (excerpt) (Jill Dolan)
- DANCE PIECE: "Awakening" (CRIPSiE)
(<https://sites.dlib.nyu.edu/hidvl/6m905wrx>)

WEEK 10: TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Monday, May 31

NO CLASS (Memorial Day)

Wednesday, June 2

The Road Ahead