

Foundations and Futures in Performance Studies



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Spring 2020, Tuesdays 1:30 – 4:30pm | Office hours: by appointment

Performance studies takes seriously that performance is a critical site of knowledge making; performance thus becomes a way of doing research, engaging in critical analysis, and staging research and theoretical concepts. Understanding performance in this way makes it an effective tool in pedagogical and political praxis. Performance studies also holds a wide conception of what performance can be: national and global exhibitions of power; gestural practices; everyday stylings of the body; and spiritual ritual. As such, this interdisciplinary field draws from and makes itself relevant to other academic disciplines: theater, literature, dance, film, art, and music; critical social theory; anthropology; geography; and history.

In this class, we will survey a range of key terms and ideas in performance studies. We will follow the genealogies of particular analytics such as performativity, memory, witnessing, ephemerality, liveness, gesture, theatricality, flesh, and body within the field. Drawing on these ideas, we will ask who gets to perform and who is required to perform, who does culture and who makes art. We will think through the ways that performance is used in / as research, and we will also perform in order to converse with readings, to explore how theory works. From beginning to end, we will ask how performance makes itself relevant to questions of gender, race, class, sexuality, and disability.

OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES

- * to introduce core ideas in the interdisciplinary field of performance studies
- * to track conversations between performance studies and other disciplines
- * to identify genealogies and new directions in performance studies concepts

- * to understand performance as a medium for doing and interpreting politics
- * to employ performance as a tool of analyzing and staging critical concepts

COMMUNICATION

Please check your Tufts email and the Canvas website regularly. If you have any problems concerning the course, if you want to better prepare for assignments, or for any other issues related to this class, please don't hesitate to schedule an appointment. I want to make sure you get the most out of this class.

REQUIRED READINGS / VIEWINGS

There are four required books for this class (see Week 10 – 13). All other readings are available via Canvas as PDFs. There are 'further readings' uploaded to Canvas (indented on the Canvas module), they are *not required* for class, but for you to explore on your own time, or in eventually in preparation for comprehensive exams. I encourage you to read the texts in the order listed on the syllabus. I expect all required reading to be done before coming to class each day; give yourself time to process the readings before class, and take notes accordingly so that you are prepared to discuss them.

ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION, PREPAREDNESS, TECHNOLOGY

Attendance is mandatory at all classes; please let me know in advance if you plan to be absent otherwise your absence will affect your overall grade. This is a discussion-based class, and so I expect active participation from all of you. I interpret disengagement in class as a lack of preparedness with the assigned materials, and this can affect your grade. Please do not use phones while in class except in cases of emergency.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

The classroom is a place for dialogue across intellectual and identitarian difference; I am committed to making sure that all students can pursue their interests and engage with materials in an environment that is supportive, curious, and healthy. Respect each other's identities and also grant each other grace to make mistakes. Please be aware of how you take up space and time in the class; be sure to share airtime and to direct your comments and questions to your peers and not just to me.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Your writing should consist of *your* own ideas, words, and information you have collated. When you are quoting or referencing a resource other than your own work, please make this is evident using citations. You are expected to be familiar with the Tufts University academic integrity guidelines: <https://students.tufts.edu/student-affairs/student-life-policies/academic-integrity-policy>

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

If the reading or writing assignments prove to be challenging (and they should be!) I want to encourage you to seek help. There's always room to grow and skills to be learned, and there should be no stigma attached to getting support. You're always welcome to talk to me about these things, and also know that there is an Academic Resource Center available to you: <https://students.tufts.edu/academic-advice-and-support/academic-resource-center/>

ACCOMODATIONS

We each arrive to the classroom with different learning needs and it is my intention to create as supportive an environment as possible. If you do need accommodations, please meet with me as soon as possible, and also visit the Student Accessibility Services Office and website for further support: <https://students.tufts.edu/student-accessibility-services>.

ASSIGNMENTS

WEEKLY DOSSIER

For weeks 1 – 8, one person will be responsible for crafting a dossier based on the week's readings. These should be emailed to me and your colleagues by 11:45am on the day of class so that those who'd like to print out copies beforehand are able to. For each of the texts assigned that day, the dossier should cover, in point form as below:

- * What is it from?
A monograph, anthology, journal, special issue of a journal, website? Tell us more about it the source if you think it helps contextualize the work.
- * Who is the author?
What is their discipline, department, institution, career trajectory. What *else* do they write about?
- * What is the chapter / essay's thesis?
Can you find the actual sentence(s) where the author makes a claim? Do they make several?
- * How do they articulate the value of their argument?
Are they arguing against someone else's claim? Are they excavating an undertheorized / underinvestigated archive?
Are they bringing a new approach to an over-studied object? Are they bringing unlikely intellectual fields into conversation?
- * How is data gathered?
What archives is the author working with? Do they reveal what kind of effort went into doing the research? Can you infer that information? Where was their field site? How did they interact with people to learn what they did?
- * How is data analyzed?
What do they do with the data they gathered? Have they picked out particular words, ideas, aesthetics to focus on?
What becomes relevant in their engagement with the data?
- * What theories and frameworks are applied in justifying the project and interpreting data?
I'm not asking for a review of their literature review, but rather can you identify specific concepts or scholars that the author seems to be leaning on in order to arrive at the conclusions they do?
- * What ideas / terms (not just words you can look up in a dictionary) were unfamiliar?
This is so that we as a class can help fill in the blanks around weighty or unfamiliar concepts / ideas.

This exercise is designed to help you perform an anatomy of critical writing so that you can be more conscious of the mechanics of your own research and writing. It is also an attempt to make visible the *methods and methodologies* of performance studies, and give you perspective on who is in the field and how they're connected. Also, it will hopefully serve as a foundation for your podcast episode.

PODCASTS

In groups of two or three (depending on the class size), you will develop a 45 - 50 minute podcast episode based on the week's themes. The podcast will be due three weeks after the class session that you're basing it on. You will be responsible for three podcasts over the semester, you don't have to work with the same people each time. The podcast should show a clear understanding of the texts assigned that week, how they connect thematically, how they build off previous conversations. You are encouraged to be opinionated, animated, make bold stylistic choices, use case studies from pop culture, public phenomena, news, or the art world, and to talk about yourselves. Feel free to reference classroom discussions as well: what did you think when you read the texts, and what connections did you make *through* conversations in class. Relevant audio clips are also welcome. You can look to Garageband and Audacity as user friendly interfaces for basic audio recording and editing, unless you are more tech-savvy, then please, go wild! We will find a public home on the interwebs for these episodes. On each episode, be sure to 1) introduce yourselves, 2) introduce the podcast (we'll decide on a name together), 3) decide on an episode title that captures the themes you'll be taking up. Please submit in MP3 format via Canvas, and include a 100-word summary of the episode to accompany the web-listing.

This assignment is designed to cultivate a habit of speaking about scholarship in conversational and colloquial terms, to help you synthesize ideas across the essays assigned, and to encourage collaborative work. This kind of synthesis is also good preparation for comprehensive exams. It is also an opportunity to create a public archive of our conversations in the effort to make scholarship available beyond our classroom, and the academy.

RESEARCH AS PERFORMANCE: PROPOSAL, MEETING, PERFORMANCE, SHOWCASE, RESPONSE

This exercise asks you to turn a research question into performance. If you were to write a research essay for this class, you would probably locate a particular cultural phenomenon (artwork, artist, event, pop culture icon, performance script) and apply concepts we've learned about in class to ask new questions about that phenomenon. Rather than write that essay, how can you stage that research question? How can you *show* rather than *tell* your research project and question? Feel free to use narrative performance conventions, abstraction, rearrange the room, turn us into your co-participants, engage us in a game, make us silent witnesses. Will you invent a character, will you be your everyday self? How does it begin, how does it end? Your performance can be fully memorized and rehearsed, or can use improvisation, ritual, and play. Also, as you imagine your presentation, think about how to rely as little as possible on visual technology as it tends to slow us down, glitch, or even betray us. A 2-page proposal outlining your aesthetic and intellectual interests will be due on **March 3**, and you must meet with me **before Spring Break** to discuss the proposal. Performances should be under 10 minutes, which will allow up to 20

minutes for conversation and feedback. For our final class on **Tuesday April 21** everyone will have the opportunity to restage their performance in a showcase open to your friends and the department. A 2-3 page double spaced response to this exercise will be due on May 8.

This assignment is designed to hold us accountable as performance scholars who claim that performance *is* theory and research, to push us to work in this mode as well. It is also an opportunity to develop familiarity with particular concepts from the class, conduct independent research, and use performance as a way to process ideas and theories.

GRADING SCHEME

PODCASTS: 60%

DOSSIER: 15%

RESEARCH AS PERFORMANCE: 25%

GRADING RUBRIC

- A = excellent in all areas. Writing presents a strong thesis statement, is argued coherently, offers clear evidence to support your ideas, and demonstrates a clear understanding of works cited. Mechanics are excellent with correct spelling, grammar, and citations. Performance / presentation is coherent, expertly organized, and confidently delivered. Takes stylistic risks in ways that benefit the project, and evidences advanced preparation.
- B = good. Writing presents a good thesis statement; the argument and evidence are okay, but could be stronger. Grammar and citations are correct with few spelling errors. Performance / presentation has cohesion but could do with better organization, delivery, style, or preparation.
- C = meets minimum requirements of assignment. Writing presents a passable thesis statement. An argument and evidence exists, but is either not convincing or not well articulated. More than a few errors in grammar, spelling, or citations. Performance / presentation shows potential / germination of productive ideas, but poorly executed.
- F = falls short of minimum requirements, but effort in completing the assignment has been made. Thesis, evidence, and argument either very weak or missing. Significant errors in grammar, spelling, or citations. Performance / presentation shows lack of organization, understanding, or preparation.

CALENDAR

WEEK 1 -- Jan 21: WHAT IS PERFORMANCE (STUDIES)?

Shannon Jackson: Discipline and Performance (*Professing Performance*)

Richard Schechner: What is performance studies? What is performance? (*Performance studies, an introduction*)

Dwight Conquergood: Performance studies: interventions and radical research

Diana Taylor: Acts of Transfer (*The Archive and the Repertoire*)

D. Soyini Madison: Performance is a promiscuous lover

FURTHER READING:

Dwight Conquergood: Beyond the text

D. Soyini Madison: Performing theory / embodied writing

WEEK 2 – Jan 28: PERFORMATIVITY: DOING, BEING, BECOMING

Judith Butler: Excerpt p.190-193 only (*Gender Trouble*)

Judith Butler: Burning Acts—Injurious Speech (*Performativity and Performance*)

José Esteban Muñoz: The White to Be Angry (*Disidentifications*)

E. Patrick Johnson: Introduction (*Appropriating Blackness*)

Joshua Chambers-Letson: The Nail That Stands Out (*A Race So Different*)

Harvey Young: The black body as souvenir in American lynching

Della Pollock: Failing

FURTHER READING

J. L. Austin: Lecture 1 (*How to do things with words*)

Judith Butler: Bodies that matter (*Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of 'sex'*)

Victor Turner: Liminal to Liminoid (*From Ritual to Theater*)

Amelia Jones: Material traces

Elin Diamond: Introduction (*Performance and Cultural Politics*)

WEEK 3 -- Feb 4: OFF STAGE: AUDIENCE, WITNESS, REHEARSAL, RITUAL

Victor Turner: Dramatic ritual/ritual drama (*From Theatre to Ritual*)
Soyini Madison: Co-performative witnessing
Della Pollock: Introduction (*Remembering: Oral History Performance*)
Chloe Johnston: On not falling
Sarah Bay-Cheng: Unseen
Jill Dolan: The dynamics of desire (*The Feminist Spectator as Critic*)

FURTHER READING:

Kimberly Juanita Brown: Regarding the Pain of the Others (*Feeling Photography*)
Susan Manning: The female dancer and the male gaze (*Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies in Dance*)
Tracy Davis: *Stages of Emergency*
Danielle Goldman: The land of the free (*I Want to be Ready*)

WEEK 4 -- Feb 11: SENSATIONAL: EXHIBITION, SPECTACLE, FLESH

Hortense Spillers: Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe
Saidiya Hartman: Innocent Amusements (*Scenes of Subjection*)
Jennifer Tyburczy: Nudes and Nazis (*Sex Museums*)
Uri McMillan: Mammy Memory (*Embodied Avatars*)
Ashon Crawley: Breathing Flesh
Karen Tongson: Empty Orchestra
Anita Mannur & Martin Manalansan: Dude, what's that smell?

FURTHER READING;

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Performing Live
Josh Kun: The Aural Border
Amber Musser: *Sensational Flesh*

WEEK 5 -- Feb 18: CORPOREAL TIME: MEMORY, EPHEMERALITY, SPEED, SURROGATION

Peggy Phelan: The ontology of performance (*Unmarked*)
Philip Auslander – Liveness (*Performance & Cultural Politics*)
Joseph Roach – Introduction (*Cities of the Dead*)
Sandra Richards: Who is the ancestor?
Shane Vogel – Closing Time
Kemi Adeyemi: The Practice of Slowness

FURTHER READING:

Judith Hamera – Corporeal Chronotopes (from *Dancing Communities*)
Mikhail Bakhtin: The forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel (*The Dialogic Imagination*)
Susan Leigh Foster – Pygmalion's No-Body and the Body of Dance (*Performance and Cultural Politics*)
José Esteban Muñoz: Ephemera as evidence

WEEK 6 – Feb 25: EVERYDAY: STYLE, PLAY, HABITUS

Michel de Certeau: Making Do (*The Practice of Everyday Life*)
Sean Metzger: Introduction (*Chinese Looks*)
Bryant Keith Alexander: Phantoms, amputations, and mournings
Kyra Gaunt: Slide (*The Games Black Girls Play*)
Robin Bernstein: The Scripts of Black Dolls
Summer Kim Lee: Staying In

FURTHER READING:

Pierre Bourdieu: Structures and Habitus (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*)
Victor Turner: Acting in Everyday Life (*From Ritual to Theater*)

Erving Goffman: Introduction (*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*)

WEEK 7 -- Mar 3: POLITICAL ECONOMIES: GOVERNANCE, LABOR, ACTIVISM, ART

Jisha Menon: Bordering on Drama (*The Performance of Nationalism*)
Elizabeth Son: Introduction (*Embodied Reckonings*)
Thomas DeFrantz: Unchecked Popularity (*Neoliberalism and Global Theatres*)
Patrick McKelvey: Ron Whyte's "Disemployment"
Joshua Chambers-Letson: Searching for Danh Vo's Mother
Jasmine Mahmoud: Brooklyn's Experimental Frontiers

FURTHER READING:

Dwight Conquergood: Lethal Theatre
Nao Bustamante and Coco Fusco: STUFF
Soyini Madison: That was my occupation

WEEK 8 -- Mar 10: EMBODIED METHODS: ETHNOGRAPHY, INTERPRETATION, ADAPTATION

Susan Foster: Choreographies of protest
Amelia Jones: Art History / Art Criticism
Broderick Chow: Work and shoot
Soyini Madison: Performing the political economies of water
E. Patrick Johnson: From Page to Stage
Della Pollock: The performative "I"

FURTHER READING:

Dwight Conquergood: Rethinking Ethnography
Barnaby King: Close/Clown Encounters
Kim Marra: Riding, scarring, knowing

WEEK 9 -- Spring break

WEEK 10 -- Mar 24: Judith Hamera: *Unfinished Business*

WEEK 11 -- Mar 31: Patrick Anderson: *Autobiography of a Disease*

WEEK 12 -- Apr 7: Hershini Bhana Young: *Illegible Will*

WEEK 13 -- Apr 14: Ronak Kapadia: *Insurgent Aesthetics*

WEEK 14 -- Apr 21: PERFORMANCE SHOWCASE