

Professor Grobe
cgrobe@amherst.edu

Office hours: M 2-4pm
(and by appointment)
in Johnson Chapel #105

ENGL 230: INTRODUCTION TO PERFORMANCE THEORY

MONDAY & WEDNESDAY, 12:30-1:50

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The term “performance” can refer to any of the stylized doings that define our world. This, of course, includes the traditional performing arts, but it also encompasses religious rituals, public ceremonies, political protests, sports events, social media use, etc. “Performance” can even describe the regimented behaviors that structure our everyday lives, whether we’re aware of them or not.

In this course, you will explore this full range of performance through readings, screenings, and attendance at live performances. We will be guided in our approach by critical and theoretical texts in the interdisciplinary field of “performance studies.” Guiding questions will include: How is a performance different from a text? How do we enact a shared reality? How have the major forces shaping our world (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, nationality) been created and sustained through acts of performance?

REQUIRED TEXTS *(available at Amherst Books)*

Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2013)

Diana Taylor, *Performance* (Duke UP, 2016).

James Baldwin, *Blues for Mister Charlie*, reprint ed. (Vintage, 1995) 0679761780

All texts labeled **(cp)** appear in the course packet *(available in Johnson Chapel #001)*

All materials labeled **(Moodle)** will appear on the course’s Moodle site

COURSE FORMAT & REQUIREMENTS

What will happen in class?

A typical class session will combine discussion (of the readings, viewings, etc.) with mini-lectures on key terms, concepts, or contexts.

Attendance

After add/drop period has ended, you are allowed only two excused absences from class—no notification required and no questions asked. An absence is excused as long as you submit (within a week of the missed class) a 300-500-word reflection on the readings/viewings we considered that day.

How will my grade be calculated?

10%	Participation
30%	Two Short Essays
30%	Two Keyword Assignments
30%	Final Project

Participation

There are many ways to participate in class. The most obvious one is to **speak up during discussion**: voicing your opinion or analysis of the course material, replying to the comments of others, connecting our discussion to ideas that came up earlier in the semester, or raising new examples that either corroborate or challenge what's being said.

Equally important, though, is to **ask questions**. This can happen during mini-lectures (asking me for clarification, further examples, etc.), and it can happen during discussion (e.g., asking a particular classmate to expand on a comment, asking the class to consider another aspect of our topic, etc.) It can even happen by e-mail or in office hours. But it will have to happen, one way or another. If you know this will be difficult for you, come talk to me about it.

Essays & Keyword Assignments

The due dates for these four assignments (two of each) are noted on the schedule below. Each one is marked with the following symbol: ⇒. A week or more before each deadline, prompts for the assignment will be available on Moodle, and you will also submit your final draft via that site.

Final Project

The final project can take many forms: a standard essay (6-8 pages) applying performance theory to a topic of your choosing, a video-essay (4-5 minutes) that does roughly the same thing, or an equivalent project (in any medium) devised in consultation with me.

SCHEDULE

THE WORLD AS THEATER

- M Jan. 22 Introduction
- W Jan. 24 Lakoff & Johnson, excerpts from *Metaphors We Live By* (cp)
Shakespearean and classical examples of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor (cp)
Plato's Allegory of the Cave (from *The Republic*) (cp)
- M Jan. 29 Calderón, *The Great Theater of the World* (cp)
Herrera, "The Best Actor for the Role, or the Mythos of Casting..." (cp)
- W Jan. 31 Josette Féral, excerpt from "Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language" (cp)
Goffman, "The Theatrical Frame," from *Frame Analysis* (cp)

WHAT IS PERFORMANCE?

- M Feb. 5 Taylor, Chapters 1-3
- W Feb. 7 Schechner, Chapters 2 & 7
- M Feb. 12 Taylor, *Performance*, Chapter 4
Bell, "Performance Studies in an Age of Terror" (cp)
Johnson, "Black Performance Studies: Genealogies, Politics, Futures" (cp)
- W Feb. 14 DISCUSSION/ACTIVITY: What do you practice? How do you perform?
- ⇒ **Su. Feb. 18 Personal essay (800-1000 words) due by 5pm**

WHAT IS PERFORMATIVITY?

- M Feb. 19 Austin, excerpts from *How to Do Things with Words* (cp)
Taylor, Ch. 5
- W Feb. 21 Butler, excerpt from "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (cp)
Sedgwick & Parker, Introduction to *Performativity and Performance* (cp)
- M Feb. 26 Wayne Koestenbaum, "The Codes of Diva Conduct" (cp)
Madison Moore, "Tina Theory: Notes on Fierceness" (cp)
- W Feb. 28 WATCH: *Paris Is Burning* (Moodle)
WATCH: one episode of *RuPaul's Drag Race* (Moodle)
- Th Mar. 1 OPTIONAL: *Underground Railroad Game* at Williams College**
- M Mar. 5 Williams, Introduction to *Keywords* (cp)
Review early readings from Lakoff & Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (cp)
- W Mar. 7 DISCUSSION/ACTIVITY: Keywords
- ⇒ **F. Mar. 9 Keyword entries (5 entries, ~250 words each) due by midnight**

******SPRING BREAK******

PLAYING FOR REAL

- M Mar. 19 Schechner, Chapter 3
Abramović, *Spirit Cooking* (video & print) **(Moodle)**
Various videos/articles about Abramović and “Pizzagate” **(Moodle)**
- W Mar. 21 WATCH: *The Act of Killing* **(Moodle)**

- M Mar. 26 Schechner, Chapter 4
Ono, excerpts from *Grapefruit* **(cp)**
Roach, “Deep Play, Dark Play” **(cp)**
- W Mar. 28 deLoria, excerpts from *Playing Indian* **(cp)**
WATCH: *The Couple in the Cage* **(Moodle)**

⇒ **Su. Apr. 1 Ritual/Play essay (800-1000 words) due by 5pm**

CASE STUDY: PROTEST / CIVIL RIGHTS

- M Apr. 2 Taylor, Chapters 6 & 7
Foster, “Choreographies of Protest” **(cp)**
- W Apr. 4 *Martin Luther King and The Montgomery Story* (comic book, 1957) **(Moodle)**
Shridharani, excerpt from *War Without Violence* **(Moodle)**
Gregg, excerpt from *The Power of Non-Violence* **(Moodle)**
Discussion with Professor Paige McGinley

- M Apr. 9 Brustein, “Revolution as Theatre” **(cp)**
Nechayev, “The Catechism of a Revolutionary” **(cp)**
- W Apr. 11 Peariso, “Representing Black Power”
Roach, excerpt from *Cities of the Dead* **(cp)**
Rhodes, excerpt from *Framing the Black Panthers* **(cp)**

F Apr. 13 Public talk by Professor Daphne Brooks (“The Illiberal Art of Performance”)

Sa Apr. 14 Public talk by Professor Shannon Jackson (“The Illiberal Art of Performance”)

⇒ **Su. Apr. 15 Applied Keywords (5 entries, ~250 words each) due by midnight**

- M Apr. 16 Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie* (1964)
Mitchell, “Black-authored Lynching Drama’s Challenge to Theater History” **(cp)**
- W Apr. 18 On “Freedom School” play about lynching (1964) **(Moodle)**

M Apr. 23 Final readings TBD **(Moodle)**

W Apr. 25 Conclusion

⇒ **Final Project TBD**