

CA 826: New Approaches in Performance Studies (Fall 2022)

Instructor:

Dr. Peter Dickinson (peter_dickinson@sfu.ca)

Office Hours:

By appointment, GCA 3855

Meeting Time and Location:

Wednesday, 2:30 pm-5:20 pm, GCA 2205

Course Description:

This course introduces students to the interdisciplinary field of performance studies, a practice-based mode of inquiry that takes performance as both an object of study and a method of analysis. That is, we will examine the creative content and (inter)cultural contexts of a range of “framed” performances (from theatre, dance, music, film, visual art, and beyond); but we will also look at different social and political events, everyday enactments, and expressive behaviours *as* performances. Applying foundational readings in performance theory to a broad spectrum of issues, artists, works, and sites, students will also be invited through their assignments and in-class discussions and activities to put into practice many of performance studies’ key methodologies, including: ethnographic observation and fieldwork; performance spectatorship and analysis; documentation and reenactment; and research-creation. In their final projects, students will be invited to explore an aspect of their own research/objects of study through the lens of performance studies.

Course Objectives:

- To understand the ways performance contributes to and is constitutive of culture.
- To read and write about core concepts, methods, and theories from the discipline of performance studies.
- To observe, analyze, and interpret a range of aesthetic and social performances.
- To apply performance principles and techniques as a means of research investigation and knowledge creation.
- To develop a focused topic of performance research that combines written and performative elements.

Health and Safety:

As we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, please practice self-care and care for others in all activities related to this course, including our weekly meetings. If you are feeling ill or experiencing any symptoms related to COVID-19, please stay home and contact me regarding ways in which you can make up missed material.

Course Readings and Materials:

All readings will be posted to Canvas as PDF documents. Links to relevant video and audio materials will be included in the course syllabus.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and participation

15%

- You will be asked to complete unscheduled in-class assignments that may include brainstorming exercises, creative writing, textual and video analysis, physical activities, and collaborative experiments. These are graded on effort. **You are allowed to miss one class without penalty.** Each unexcused absence after this will result in your attendance and participation grade being lowered by 5%.

Performance presentation on syllabus topic

20%

- For this assignment, students will select a date on the syllabus during which they will make a 10-15 minute performative presentation that brings to life some aspect of that day's reading. These presentations should be brief, concise, and dynamic. You may direct us in a scene, sketch costumes, stage a puppet play, create a musical or movement score for a performance. You are limited only by your imagination! In addition to the presentation, you will provide a **one-page handout** that outlines the theoretical, critical, artistic, and/or historical contexts for the work(s) under discussion, summarizes the main elements of the reading(s), and highlights links to other texts we have studied in the class. The goal of this exercise is not to exhaust a topic, but to bring to life a few key aspects of it. Conclude your presentation with **two questions** to spark class discussion. **You must email me your outline and questions at least 2 days prior to your presentation; failure to do so will result in your grade being lowered by one letter grade (e.g., an A on your presentation becomes a B).** Dates and topics will be assigned at our first meeting.

Performance journal

25%

- For this assignment, you are asked to keep a journal in which you respond to the weekly prompts related to the syllabus readings and topics (see below). Your journal may take the form of a physical notebook; a Word or Google doc; a blog, vlog, or website; a series of Instagram posts; a box of things; or a combination of the above. Your journal entries may appear in words/text AND/OR in any of the following (blurred) genres: still or moving images; drawings; collections of objects; sound recordings; performance scripts/scores. While you are encouraged to complete journal entries for each of the prompts, **you are required to submit only five entries of your choice for assessment.** These are due on the date listed on the syllabus, below. **There is also one compulsory journal entry that you are required to complete for Sept 21 (see below);** while you will share from this orally in class on that date, it does not have to be included in your final journal submission).

Project proposal

10%

- This **one-page proposal** for your final project should clearly identify: the research question you wish to investigate; any forms supplementary to a written essay you may wish to use in conducting this investigation (e.g., a photo essay, a visual diary, an

installation, a sound or video work, a short performance, a series of movement or other scores); and the secondary theoretical, performance, and cultural criticism you will be drawing on to supplement your research (this can be included as a short bibliography). **I encourage you to consult with me before your proposals are due (see below) regarding your chosen topic and research plan.**

Final project

30%

- The course culminates in a final project that will ideally derive from one of your journal entries, and that allows you to draw on your own research practice as scholars and artists. That is, I am suggesting you choose one of the weekly topic prompts and develop it into a project proposal. For example, you may want to conduct ethnographic interviews with family members or friends on a topic related to your larger research interests; in addition to incorporating material from these interviews into your essay, you may wish to use them to develop a short, scripted live or video performance that enacts aspects of your research (see week 7). If you're interested in digital performance and new media, you may want to explore more deeply the relationship between social media and the performative "presentation of self" through an Instagram story site (see week 8). Or you may want to use reenactment to delve more deeply into the history and aesthetics of a precedent artwork that forms a part of your larger research (see week 12). Students will have a chance to make a short presentation on their research to their peers during the final class. The final paper that synthesizes your research should be **a maximum of 3000 words (approximately 8-10 doubled-spaced pages in 12-point font)** and should be sent to me via email as a **Word document** by **noon on Dec 7**. It may be accompanied by any supplementary "performance materials" you wish me to look at.

Weekly Syllabus:

1. Sept 7: Introduction to the Course: What is Performance and What is Performance Studies?

Read:

- Richard Schechner, "What is Performance?" and "What is Performance Studies?"
- Marvin Carlson, "Introduction: What is Performance?"
- Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Performance Studies"

Journal Prompt: Are there limits to PS's "broad spectrum" approach, as articulated by Schechner? Does the absorption of all enactments or "doings" *as* performances risk overwriting or marginalizing the performing arts? What's in a name? What statement does it make and why is or isn't it important to label what it is that we do? Select an action or activity not typically thought of as a performance, such as getting a medical procedure, ordering a drink at a bar, or waiting for the bus. In what ways can this event be analyzed "as" a performance? What is gained and/or lost by employing this interpretive frame? Try your hand at coining and defining a term that captures some essential dimension of this performance.

2. Sept 14: Other(ed) Performance Histories: Indigenous, Intercultural, Imperialist

Read:

- Coco Fusco, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance"
- Dylan Robinson, "Enchantment's Irreconcilable Connection: Listening to Anger, Being Idle No More"
- Jon McKenzie, "Is Performance Studies Imperialist?"
- Virginie Magnat, "Decolonizing Performance Research" (OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL READING)

Watch:

- Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Pena, [The Couple in the Cage](#) (1992)

Journal Prompt: Choose a global majority (i.e., non-Western/Euro-American) event. How can a performance studies approach help you make sense of this event? What are the limitations, if any, of approaching this topic in this way? OR: Using *The Couple in the Cage* as a jumping-off point, how can the tools of performance and performance studies help reframe racist and imperialist scenarios of "conquest" in the Americas or elsewhere? What are some potential risks of such a reframing?

3. Sept 21: Performance and Practice-as-Research

Read:

- Baz Kershaw, "Practice as Research through Performance"
- Ben Spatz, "Introduction: What Can A Body Do?"

COMPULSORY Journal Prompt: Looking ahead to the topics for subsequent weeks, brainstorm a research project that is best approached through a performance methodology, and that resonates with your own scholarly and/or artistic practice/object of study. Describe the project and imagine how you might enact it (where, when, how, why, etc.) and, if relevant, document it. Coin (or repurpose) a keyword or phrase that encapsulates your approach to this topic. Offer a working definition of this term. Be prepared to share aspects of this journal entry in class.

4. Sept 28: Performance and Place

Read:

- Paul Makeham, "Performing the City"
- Selena Couture, "Land, Language, Place Names, and Performance"
- Yoko Ono, [Map Piece](#) (1962/64)

Watch/Listen:

- Rebecca Belmore, [Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother](#) (1991-) and [Vigil](#) (2002)
- Jana Winderen, [Pasvikadelen](#) (2014)

Journal Prompt: Perform a version of Ono's Map Piece. OR: Take a different/additional walk/amble in your neighbourhood and/or set up an observational post in a park or café. Pay attention to the micro- and macro-performances of place (including your own) happening around you: the everyday human and animal social dramas playing out before you; the spectacle of signature architecture or LED screens or billboard advertisements; the transformation of institutional spaces through licit and illicit performative acts (busking, graffiti tagging, skateboarding, protesting); the different performative maps of the city evoked through sound or taste or smell or touch or sight; the theatre of the weather and natural elements; unexpected choreographic encounters with objects or people or place names. Record your observations however you wish (in a notebook, on your smartphone, via a collection of found artifacts); use this to compose a short performance script or score or assemblage of your devising.

5. Oct 5: Performance and Ritual

Read:

- Richard Schechner, "Ritual"
- Victor Turner, "Are there universals of performance in myth, ritual, and drama?"

Watch:

- Douglas Gordan and Philippe Parreno, [Zidane: A 21st-Century Portrait](#) (2006)
- Reverend Billy and the Stop Shopping Choir, [What Would Jesus Buy?](#) (2012)

Journal Prompt: Identify an event, ceremony, or practice (it can be secular or sacred, cross-cultural or culturally specific; e.g., a sporting event or a wedding or dining out at a restaurant) and examine its ritual qualities, as discussed by Schechner and Turner. In what ways is it similar to theatre and performance? How is it different? OR: Reflect on an activity that you practice in some kind of ritual fashion (e.g., yoga or running or other exercise; meditation; cooking or baking; video gaming; piano-playing; etc.). In what ways does it conform to the patterns discussed by Schechner and Turner? Is there a liminal or "liminoid" phase that you enter into as part of your process?

6. Oct 12: **CLASS CANCELLED**

I am involved in organizing a major international conference for the Dance Studies Association this week. As a result of a pre-conference event, I am coordinating in the World Art Centre on this day, our October 12 class is cancelled. I encourage you to join this event if you are able. Otherwise, please use the time to work on your project proposals.

Project proposals due via email as Word documents by noon on Oct 14

7. Oct 19: Performance and Ethnography

Read:

- D. Soyini Madison, "Performance and what it does to ethnography"
- E. Patrick Johnson, "Introduction," from *Sweet Tea: Gay Black Men from the South—An Oral History*
- Angela Latham, "Jesus Camp Queen"
- Joe Dumit, "Notes Toward Critical Ethnographic Scores: Anthropology and Improvisation Training in a Breached World" (OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL READING)

Watch:

- E. Patrick Johnson, [Pouring Tea](#) video excerpts (2009)
- Angela Latham, [Jesus Camp Queen](#) (2017)

Journal Prompt: Ask permission to interview a family member or a friend. What kinds of questions would you ask? What kinds of questions, if any, should you avoid? If you wanted to use the narrative of your interview as the basis for a performance ethnography, what form would it take? Also, how would you involve your subject, secure their permission, and protect their identity (should they wish it)? OR: Think of an autoethnographic story you would like to tell. Create an improvisatory score that could be shared with/performed by others.

8. Oct 26: Performance and Everyday Life: From the Social Self to the Self on Social Media

Read:

- Erving Goffman, "Performances: Belief in the Part one is Playing," from *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*
- Bernie Hogan, "The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media"

Follow:

- [@cindysherman](#)
- [@amaliaulman](#) and [#excellencesandperfections](#)

Journal Prompt: Follow an artist/celebrity/public figure across their social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.). What are they performing? To whom? How? To what ends? Are they ever not performing, or is the art/life divide hopelessly collapsed on social media? OR: Track your own presentation of self on social media. How conscious are you of "curating" what you exhibit online?

9. Nov 2: Performativity: From Speech Acts to Identity Acts

Read:

- J.L. Austin, "How to Do Things with Words: Lecture II"
- Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory"

- José Estaban Muñoz, “Introduction: Performing Disidentifications”

Watch:

- Anna Deavere Smith, *Fires in the Mirror* (1992; [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#), [Part 5](#), and [Part 6](#))
- Yoko Ono, [Cut Piece](#) (1964-66/2003)
- Marina Abramovic, [Rhythm 0](#) (1974)

Journal Prompt: ANSWER ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS: Why does Austin designate performative speech acts as felicitous or infelicitous, as opposed to true or false? Identify and analyze one felicitous and one infelicitous speech act from *Fires in the Mirror*. How does Butler apply the concept of the “performative” to gender constitution? Where do you see gender norms being subverted and/or upheld in contemporary popular culture and artistic practice? How does the 1960s and 70s performance art of Ono and Abramovic read today? How has drag been mainstreamed (e.g. RuPaul’s Drag Race) and/or how has it retained its edge as a performance form (bring in your own examples)? How does Deavere Smith play with multiple gendered, racial, ethnic, and national “misidentifications” and “disidentifications” in her work?

10. Nov 9: Performance and New Materialisms

Read:

- Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter”
- Jane Bennett, “The Force of Things”
- Robin Bernstein, “Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race”
- Amelia Jones, “Material Traces: Performativity, Artistic ‘Work,’ and New Concepts of Agency”

Watch:

- Performance documentation of Cassils’ [Becoming an Image](#)
- Patrick Blenharn, [Books](#) (password: books)

Journal Prompt: Take a photo of a random assemblage of objects on your desk, in your office/studio, in your medicine cabinet, in your kitchen sink, in the garbage, on the street corner, etc., and write not just about what you see, but what “thing-power” or “agentic capacity” you ascribe to them AND/OR how the materiality of these objects/things gets you to rethink your own materiality. OR: Focus on one thing that is especially prominent in your life and discuss how it “scripts” a performance from you; OR: Still focusing on one thing, research that thing’s material history or provenance—how was it and out of what was it made?

11. Nov 16: Performing Cultural Memory/Performing Cultural Resistance: On Gesture

Read:

- Joseph Roach, “Introduction: History, Memory, and Performance”

- Anusha Kedhar, [“Hands Up! Don’t Shoot!’: Gesture, Choreography, and Protest in Ferguson”](#)

Watch:

- [Zero Degrees](#) (password: zero)
- Ligia Lewis, [Minor Matter](#) (watch first 13 minutes of video)
- Justine A. Chambers and Laurie Young, *One Hundred More*: this performance will be showing live at The Dance Centre (677 Davie Street on October 13 and 14 at 8 pm; tickets can be purchased [here](#)); if you cannot make it to the live show, you can watch a video of a previous performance [here](#) (password: jac100)

Journal Prompt: As the texts by Roach and Kedhar outline, the body is key to acts of remembrance and resistance. Reflect on a protest movement (local or global, contemporary or historical) and catalogue some of the iconic gestures that came to define that movement (e.g., the sit-ins of the Civil Rights movement or the die-ins of the AIDS movement). Why were they effective? What was being performed through them? Where do we see traces of those gestures in our collective “kinesthetic imagination” today? OR: Choose a public commemoration or celebration (e.g. Remembrance Day or the Women’s Memorial March; Diwali Fest or Chinese New Year) and examine where we see the gestural transmission of cultural memory. To what extent has this transmission been displaced or “surrogated” (in Roach’s formulation) over time, and depending on the location/context? OR: Having reviewed the dance performances under discussion this week, what signature gestures stayed with you? Why? If you were to come up with gestures of your own in response, what would they look like? Where and how would you perform them?

12. Nov 23: The Afterlives of Performance: Archives and Repertoires; Documentation and Reenactment

Read:

- Diana Taylor, “Acts of Transfer”
- Philip Auslander, “The Performativity of Performance Documentation”
- Rebecca Schneider, “Foreword—by way of other directions,” from *Performing Remains*

Watch:

- Pierre Huyghe, [The Third Memory](#) (1999)

Journal Prompt: Drawing from materials in your home, curate an archive that is reflective of some aspect of your object of study (however you wish to define it). If you had to “reanimate” that archive as a performance, what would it look like? OR: Think of a repertory act that is meaningful to you, and that you do regularly (e.g. cooking, sewing, singing, storytelling), and that you believe escapes capture by the archive. Describe it as a performance. How and where does it live? OR: Choose a precedent event (artistic or social/historical) and think about how you would reenact it. What issues (logistical, material, ethical) would you have to consider? What would be the intent and some of the possible effects of your re-do? (Feel free to think about this last prompt in relation to Taylor’s discussion of the features of the “scenario” and

how this might pertain to your thoughts on the second of the suggested prompts for Week 2, above.)

Performance journals due

13. Nov 30: **Project Presentations**

Final essays (and supplementary materials) due electronically by noon on Dec 7

Course and Grading Policies

- It is our collective responsibility to maintain a classroom environment where all feel comfortable to speak, and where intellectual curiosity fuels dialogue and debate. Please remind me, and your peers, of your preferred gender pronouns, and please respect those preferences in others.
- All students are advised to become familiar with SFU regulations pertaining to student conduct (<http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/student/s10-05.html>), and to bring any questions or concerns to my attention.
- Students with hidden or visible disabilities who believe they may need classroom or assignment accommodations are encouraged to register with the [SFU Centre for Accessible Learning](#) (CAL) as soon as possible to ensure that they are eligible, and that approved accommodations and services are implemented in a timely fashion. Otherwise, please talk to me privately **before the second week of class** to discuss anything you wish me to be aware of in terms of your anticipated contributions to and performance in the class. If, at any time, you feel you require additional outside support, you may contact the Office of Student Support, Rights and Responsibilities at student_support@sfu.ca.
- **No late assignments will be accepted without a documented medical excuse.**
- **Plagiarism or academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated.** Consult the following website for more information: <https://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/student/s10-01.html>. **Ignorance of the standards set out by the School and university will not preclude the imposition of severe penalties for any instance of academic dishonesty.**
- All assignments (oral and written) will be assessed according to **content** and **expression**: that is, **what** you say and **how** you say it. All assignments will be given letter grades and will be assessed according to the following standards:

Grade	GPA/%	Description	Comments
A+	4.33 95-100%	Outstanding	Demonstrates an outstanding knowledge of concepts and techniques with a very high degree of skill and originality; an exceptional ability to communicate; evidence of outstanding research skills and an extensive knowledge base.
A	4.0 90-94%	Excellent	Demonstrates an excellent knowledge of concepts and techniques with a high degree of skill and elements of originality; a strong ability to communicate; excellent research and conceptual skills.

A-	3.67 85-89%		
B+	3.33 80-84%	Very Good	Demonstrates a very good knowledge of concepts and techniques, some originality and independence of thought; above average research and conceptual skills.
B	3.0 75-79%	Good	Demonstrates a good knowledge of concepts and techniques; an ability to organize and analyze ideas and to communicate clearly and fluently; good indication of research.
B-	2.67 70-74%		
C+	2.33 65-69%	Satisfactory/Marginal	Demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of concepts and techniques, together with some skill in using them; an adequate indication of research.
C	2.0 60-64%		
F	0.00 0-49%	Fail	Demonstrates an inadequate understanding of the subject matter; poor organization and communication skills. A student at this level has failed to meet the minimum requirements to pass.
FD	N/A	Fail (academic discipline)	This grade is awarded when a student has committed academic dishonesty (see Policy S10.01 Appendix 3). The grade will remain on a student's transcript until two years following graduation at which time it will convert to F.
N	0	Incomplete	Some or all of the coursework is incomplete. The instructor does not expect the student to ever complete the coursework.
DE	N/A	Deferred	Some of the coursework is not yet complete for valid (documented) reasons (e.g., medical). The instructor and student have determined a mutually agreeable timeline for the completion of the coursework.
GN	N/A	Grade Not Available	Grade not available due to circumstances beyond instructor/TA control.
AE	N/A	Compassionate Pass	The student has done at least 50% of the coursework, and would pass the course by completing the remainder, but has a compelling reason not to do so (e.g., medical, family crisis/death, etc.).