

**ENGL 380**  
**TEXT AND PERFORMANCE**  
**Fall 2018**

**Instructor Contact Info:**

Dr. Peter Dickinson

[peter\\_dickinson@sfu.ca](mailto:peter_dickinson@sfu.ca)

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:30-2:30 pm, GCA 3510

Thursdays, 2:30-3:30 pm, AQ 6117

**Lecture Time and Location:**

Thurs, 10:30-2:20 pm, WMC 3253

**Course Description:** In this course we will examine the networked relationship between text and performance from a number of different angles. First, we will look at two recent performative adaptations (one theatrical, the other cinematic) of an ancient play, the text of which we will read retrospectively, that is, as a post-script to the other media. We will then study another contemporary work of drama, focusing on how its textual information might be actualized in performance. Next, we turn to a discussion of the performativity of language and identity on digital and social media platforms, looking at how texting, tweeting, posting, and Instagramming have shaped presentations of self in our current moment, as well as how such technologies are shaping new literary genres such as “Twitterature.” We will conclude by discussing the book as a performing object, a handmade version of which students will be asked to make as their final assignment.

**Please note:** Students who enroll in this course will be required to attend Bard on the Beach’s production of *Lysistrata* on one of the following dates: September 11, 12, or 13 (all shows at 7:30 pm). Tickets (at discounted student prices) will be available for purchase from the instructor at the first class.

**Prerequisites:** two 200 division English courses, or permission of the instructor.

**Required Texts:**

Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, trans. Douglass Parker (Signet; reprint edition, 2009; 978-0451531247)

Anne Carson, *NOX* (New Directions, 2010; 978-0811218702)

Caryl Churchill, *Love and Information* (TCG; reprint edition, 2013; 978-1559364409)

Jennifer Egan, “Black Box” (2012; posted online to Canvas)

Spike Lee, dir., *Chi-Raq* (2015; to be screened in class)

\*Additional critical readings will be posted online to Canvas.

**Course Requirements:**

Attendance and active participation	10%
Reading quizzes	20%
Argumentative essay on <i>Lysistrata</i>	20%
Performance presentation and written reflection on <i>Love and Information</i>	15%
Research presentation and written reflection on digital/social media platform	20%
Performing book assignment and written reflection	15%

To receive credit for this course, students must complete all requirements.

## Syllabus

- Sept 6            General introduction to the course
- Read: Carl Lavery, “Is there a text in this performance?” (on Canvas)
- Sept 13           General introduction to *Lysistrata* and its performance history  
                    Screening of *Chi-Raq*
- Read: Miriam Felton-Dansky, “Everything is Everywhere: Viral Performance Networks” (on Canvas)
- Sept 20           Discussion of *Lysistrata*: text; Bard production; and Lee film  
                    **Quiz #1**
- Read: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*; and Casey Dué, “Get in Formation” (on Canvas)
- Lysistrata* essays due by email at noon on Sept 25**
- Sept 27           Discussion of *Love and Information*  
                    **Quiz #2**
- Read: Caryl Churchill, *Love and Information*; R. Darren Gobert, from *The Theatre of Caryl Churchill* (on Canvas); and ACT *Love and Information* production notes (on Canvas)
- Oct 4             *Love and Information* group performance workshop
- Oct 11            *Love and Information* performance presentations
- Love and Information* reflections due by email at noon on Oct 13**
- Oct 18            The performance and performativity of identity in everyday life: some theories
- Read: Erving Goffman, from *The Practice of Self in Everyday Life*; J.L. Austin, from *How to Do Things with Words*; and Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” (all on Canvas)
- Oct 25            The performance and performativity of identity on social media
- Read: Janina Wildfeuer, “From text to performance”; Bernie Hogan, “The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media”; and Zizi Papacharissi, “Without You I’m Nothing” (all on Canvas)
- Nov 1             **Class cancelled**

Nov 8            Social media research presentations

**Social media research reflections due by email at noon on Nov 10**

Nov 15          Twitterature as a new literary genre

Read: Jennifer Egan, “Black Box” (on Canvas); and Kirsten Uzkalo and Darren Harkness, “Consider the Source” (on Canvas)

Nov 22          The book as performing object

Read: Anne Carson, *NOX*; Robin Bernstein, “Dances with Things” (on Canvas); and Liedeke Plate, “How to Do Things with Literature in the Digital Age” (on Canvas)

Nov 29          Performing books presentations

**Performing book assignments due in class**

**A Note on the Course Readings**

- This course is not heavy in primary texts. There is no excuse not to have each one listed here read by the week we are to discuss it in class. And, as added insurance on that front, you will be quizzed on their content (see below).
- Additionally, most weeks I am asking everyone in the class to read one or more critical articles that will help provide some larger theoretical/conceptual focus and continuity to the successive issues we will be discussing. These articles have been posted to our class website on Canvas. Log into Canvas at <https://canvas.sfu.ca> using your SFU computing id and password; under the “Courses” header, click on ENGL 380 and all the posted material related to this course should appear.

**Bard Theatre Production**

- Because Bard on the Beach’s production of their new adaptation of *Lysistrata* (by Jennifer Wise and Lois Anderson) is winding down just as our class is beginning, I have had to book tickets to the remaining relevant performances in advance.
- There are three evening performances to choose from: September 11, 12, or 13 (all shows at 7:30 pm).
- The price of each ticket is \$20 (heavily discounted), and tickets will be distributed at the first class (Sept 6). Please have your money ready at that time. As 10 tickets have been purchased per show, I ask that students be flexible in their choice of performance date. There may also be extra tickets, so if you want to bring a friend, let me know.
- Bard on the Beach takes place under the white and red tents at Vanier Park on Kits Point, in Vancouver. More information on directions and parking, etc., can be found here: <https://bardonthebeach.org/bard-village/directions-parking/>.

### Seminar Attendance and Participation

- As this is an upper-level class, my expectation is that all members will attend regularly and participate actively and enthusiastically. In order to facilitate this, it is our collective responsibility to maintain a classroom environment where all feel comfortable to speak, and where intellectual curiosity fuels dialogue and debate.
- Some of us feel more at ease speaking in public than others; at the same time, be advised that sustained silence will be construed by myself, and by your fellow students, as disinterestedness or a critical indifference to the material. Likewise, absences that cannot be justified for medical reasons will seriously affect your participation grade.

### Reading Quizzes

- Students will write four short quizzes in advance of our discussion of each of the main literary texts on the course reading list: *Lysistrata* (Sept 20); *Love and Information* (Sept 27); “Black Box” (Nov 15); and *NOX* (Nov 22).
- Each quiz will include 10 content-related questions and/or passages to identify. I may also include a question or two pertaining to the content of the accompanying critical articles.
- The quizzes will be written at the beginning of each class and should take no more than 10 minutes (a minute per question). They will then be immediately exchanged for peer evaluation according to answers supplied orally by me. One mark per question for a maximum score of 10 per quiz.
- I will collect and retain the marked quizzes, eventually reducing the total to a final mark out of 20.
- If you do the required reading, then theoretically this should prove another easy way for you to boost your mark. **The catch is that missed quizzes cannot be re-written, even due to illness or other documentable circumstances.**

### Argumentative Essay on *Lysistrata*

- For their first assignment, students are required to analyze the textual and/or performative relationships between Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* and one of the two adaptations of this text we will have watched together (i.e., either the Bard on the Beach theatre production OR Spike Lee’s film *Chi-Raq*).
- Students may choose to focus on how a key character is depicted across their chosen texts/performances; on continuities or discontinuities in theme or language; on how ideas of postscript (Lavery) might be operating in your interpretation of one text/performance in relation to another; and so on.
- You are encouraged though not required to do additional secondary research (beyond the critical readings we will have examined in class) for this essay.
- Your essay must have a clear argument and that argument must be supported by evidence from the texts/performances under consideration.
- Your essay must be **no longer than 4 double-spaced pages (exclusive of Works Cited list and title page); must be written in 12-point font, with one-inch margins; and must follow MLA style and citation guidelines.**
- Your papers are to be submitted electronically as Word documents to my email address by noon on Tuesday, Sept 25.

### **Performance Presentation and Written Reflection on *Love and Information***

- For their second assignment, students will work in groups (4-5 students per group) to present a rough staging of a selection of scenes from Caryl Churchill's *Love and Information*.
- DO NOT PANIC about having to perform in front of your peers! I will NOT be assessing the quality of your acting nor the level of professionalism you bring to your design choices. Rather, I am interested in the performance choices you make in response to your respective groups' careful reading and discussion of the playtext. As you will see when you read the text, Churchill's play is divided up into 50 short scenes spread over seven sections, with some additional optional random scenes. She gives no information about characters (other than they're meant to be different in every scene) or setting or costumes, includes zero stage directions, and most importantly gives production teams the liberty to reorder the scenes in virtually any way they wish (albeit with some minor restrictions). On one level, this affords performers and directors and designers a degree of freedom unusual in scripted performance; at the same time, it places a heavy burden of responsibility in terms of understanding how you see the written content of different scenes fitting together, and also figuring out how your performance choices will read (or not) for an audience. As we will have had a chance to discuss the play together, as well as read related criticism and production analyses, in advance of your presentations, you will not be working in complete darkness on this front. That said, I am interested in bold and original choices whose justification comes through in performance.
- In your groups, you will: 1) decide on which scenes you wish to present; 2) what order you wish to present them in; 3) how you wish to distribute the dialogue in those scenes; and 4) what design and staging choices you wish to make within and across the respective scenes. You are free to pick any and as many scenes as you wish, and from across any combination of sections, so long as: a) the total number of scenes does not exceed 20 minutes in playing time; b) every group includes "The Last Scene"; c) every group includes at least one "Depression" scene; and d) every group includes at least one "Optional" scene.
- While this will inevitably require some out-of-class meeting and discussion, you will have the entire four hours of the October 4<sup>th</sup> class to workshop your performances. And, remember, the performances themselves can be rough: you do not need to be off-book (have your lines memorized); you don't have to incorporate a lot of fancy production elements (though simple costume, prop, lighting and sound choices are strongly encouraged); and if something doesn't go according to plan, you can stop and try things again. Also, not everyone in the group has to perform; that said, everyone does have to be integrally involved in contributing to the development and presentation of the performance (by contributing to your scene analyses of the text, offering suggestions for the production, working behind the scenes during the performance, etc.).
- The final piece of this assignment is a short, **written reflection of 500 words (double-spaced, 12-point font)** in which group members are asked to comment on their experience of moving between text and performance with *Love and Information*: the reasons behind scene and design choices; how successfully or unsuccessfully you felt these choices were received by your audience; etc. These reflections are meant to be written individually and may thus account for differences in grades between group members.
- Your reflections are to be submitted electronically as Word documents to my email address by noon on Saturday, Oct 13.

### Research Presentation and Written Reflection on Digital/Social Media Platform

- Based on our discussions of performances of self- and collective identity in everyday life in our current digital age (Oct 18 and 25), for their third assignment students are asked to research the performativity of social media: how their form and content (from 140-character political tweets to curated images of restaurant meals) help shape the presentation and reception, the mobilization and retribalization, of different identity groups.
- So, for example, you might wish to do an Austinian analysis (we'll cover what this means) of the performative power of the tweets of @POTUS: how, for example, they can destabilize economic markets and upend traditional political alliances. Or you may wish to research the ways in which hashtags like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter and #IdleNoMore have helped to catalyze different social justice movements. Maybe you are interested in how fan sites on Instagram respond to and remediate classic pop culture texts (e.g., everyoutfitsatc), or how YouTube has become a platform for the curation and performance of queer and trans identities, or how Facebook has essentially eliminated the distinction between public and private identities. Then, too, a focus on how various social media sites and apps police and surveil different identity performances is also an option. In all cases, students are free to contextualize/supplement their research with aspects of their own social media use—so long as it is grounded in a rigorous academic analysis.
- Students are required to clear the focus of their research with me by the end of class on Oct 25. The subsequent gathering and analysis of research data can take a number of intersecting forms: historicizing the development, circulation and uses of different platforms or trends or memes; doing a rhetorical and/or visual analysis of content; interviewing users; keeping a field notebook of your own social media habits; and, of course, reading performance and media studies scholarship on the topic.
- Following a free week of field research while I am away, students will present their research findings to the class in the form of a brief oral presentation on Nov 8. Given the focus of this assignment, you are encouraged to make this as multi-media as possible: that is, think beyond PowerPoint! Depending on final numbers in the class, these presentations will have to be a maximum of 7-10 minutes, so make it count: in other words, think of your presentation as another kind of performance!
- Likely there will be overlap in the research focus of some students, in which case collaborative presentations are possible (and welcome); just talk to me first. In all cases, however, students will submit final individual written reflections on their research. Again, these should be fairly brief (**1000 words only**), but they can be formally innovative (e.g., a series of tweets; a blog posting supplemented with extra visual and hyperlinked content; an interactive website; etc.). Regardless, the reflections are due by email at noon on Saturday, Nov 10.

### Performing Book Assignment and Written Reflection

- Stemming from our discussion of Anne Carson's *NOX*, the final assignment in the course is for students to make a book that draws attention to itself as a performing object—that is, that requires some interactive participation on the part of the reader/user, to do something beyond the standard silent reading and turning of pages (or swiping of a screen).
- Some examples of more expressly performative books might include:
  - A flipbook
  - A choose-your-own adventure story

- A songbook
- A musical score
- A colouring, paint-by-numbers, or connect-the-dots book
- An instruction manual
- A cookbook
- A book of spells
- A cut-out or pop-up book
- An online hypertext
- A dream journal
- A puzzle book
- A code book
- A play or movie script
- A book whose parts need to be assembled by the reader/user in some way
- The book can be print or digital, and it doesn't have to be long. Nor does it have to be expertly crafted, though obviously the more care you put into the book's construction and its intended application the better. You will be assessed on the overall concept behind the book rather than its look, as well as on what you have to say about its performative uses.
- To this end, you are required to include along with your book **a maximum 300-word statement** regarding what it is meant to do and/or who it is for. The book is due at our last class (Nov 29), at which time you will also have **a maximum of five minutes** to introduce and show your classmates your work. I will make arrangements to return your books with my grade and comments during the exam period.

### Grading Policies

- **No late assignments will be accepted without a documented medical excuse.**
- **Plagiarism or academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course.**  
Consult the following website for more information:  
[http://www.english.sfu.ca/documents/doc/academic\\_integrity\\_2010](http://www.english.sfu.ca/documents/doc/academic_integrity_2010). **Ignorance of the standards set out by the department 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	Percentage	Evaluation Criteria
A+	96 -100	Outstanding performance. Represents work of exceptional quality.
A	90 - 95	Content, organization, expression, and style all of a high standard.
A-	85 - 89	Comprehension of the subject and use of existing research and literature has been abundantly demonstrated. Uses sound critical thinking, has innovative ideas on the subject, argues the topic convincingly and presents sound evidence to back up claims. Shows personal engagement with the topic.
B+	80 - 84	Good performance. Represents work of above average quality with no major weaknesses in argumentation or expression. Writing is clear and
B	75 - 79	explicit and topic coverage and comprehension are more than adequate,
B-	70 - 74	although occasional lapses in reasoning or style may be present. Shows

		some degree of independent critical thinking and personal involvement in the work. Good use of existing knowledge on the subject.
C+	65 - 69	Satisfactory performance. Represents work of competent quality.
C	60 - 64	Shows some comprehension of the subject, but has more frequent
C-	55 - 59	weaknesses and/or problems in content, style, argumentation, expression, or organization. Minimal critical awareness or personal involvement in the work has been demonstrated. Only adequate use of the literature and/or addressing of the topic.
D	50 - 54	Marginal performance. Represents work of a barely adequate quality. Serious flaws in content, organization, and/or style. Grammatical errors tend to be frequent and often reflect a lack of basic linguistic competency. Argument is mostly off-topic and/or evidence is contradictory or poorly marshaled. Poor comprehension of the subject and engagement with existing research and literature. Minimal critical/personal involvement in the paper.
F	0 - 49	Failing performance. Represents work of substandard quality. Either clearly does not respond to the assigned topic or contains errors in grammar, organization, and expression that do not meet the minimum acceptable academic standards. Work that has been plagiarized should automatically receive a failing grade.