English 870: Seminar in Folklore

The Ethnography of Performance

Autumn 2004
MW 11:30-1:18
Denney 262
08309-2
Dorothy Noyes
Denney 545, 2-0387
noyes.10@osu.edu
T 3:30-5:30, W 9:30-11:30

Since the 1970s, the performance turn in folklore, anthropology, and related disciplines has illuminated our understanding of agency and efficacy in cultural production. In a major revision of the modern culture concept, it focuses on cultural forms as process and practice: not texts exemplifying a static shared worldview but historically situated, conventional transactions among persons. As part of the philosophy of language's critique of reference, it looks at how language is used to construct reality; reacting to the focus on deep structure in most grand theory, it insists on the significance of material and interactional surfaces. Today it is newly relevant as a corrective to the mystique of “values” and/or identities in contemporary cultural politics.

This seminar will examine both programmatic texts and selected case studies in the ethnography of performance: that is, an approach based in "thick description" of instances. While theory in the field has tended to develop within genre specializations, we will examine verbal art, cultural performance (ritual, festival, spectacle) and the performance of self together in the attempt to illustrate common issues and a general paradigm. Students will share in preparing for discussion and write a research paper: literary and historical topics are welcome as well as field-based projects.

Requirements

Response papers and general participation, 50%
By 9:00 PM of the night before each class meeting, students will post to the class listserv a short reaction to the assigned readings (a substantial page or two), posing issues for discussion the next day. Leave yourselves some time to read each other’s reactions.

You may miss one response paper without being penalized. Absences will, obviously, affect your participation grade. I won’t grade the response papers; a bit before the middle of the quarter, I will send you on e-mail a general evaluation of your participation in the class.

Final paper, 50%. Proposal due on Wednesday, 9/29.
The final paper may take one of several forms, depending on your current needs and interests:

- a case study of a specific performance or set of performances, informed by some of the theorists we are reading
Plagiarism is the representation of another's works or ideas as one's own: it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas. All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. And remember: to plagiarize convincingly is much more difficult than to do the work yourself.

The Office for Disability Services, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact the ODS at 2-3307.

Texts
The following books have been ordered at SBX only:


Readings marked ONLINE are available through the journal databases on the library Web site: do a search in Oscar under the journal title, then search the article from there. Other readings are on closed reserve in the library. (The coursepack with copyright permissions was estimated at $168, so I opted for this less convenient but more affordable system.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/22</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/27</td>
<td>The performance turn in folklore, linguistics, and anthropology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9/29   **Form, function, emergence**
Read Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Bauman essay only)
Due Paper proposal

10/4  **Genre**


10/6  **Frame and metacommunication**


10/11  **Reflexivity**

Basso, *Portraits of “the Whiteman.”*

10/13  **No class: American Folklore Society meetings**

10/18  **Transformation**


10/20

**Inversion and the carnivalesque**

Read


10/25

**Trope, persuasion, representation**

Read


10/27

**Formalization**

Read


11/1

**Flow and virtuosity**

Film

*Scratch*. Doug Pray, 2001

Read


11/3 Epistemology and performative knowledge

11/8 Normal appearances and the self


11/15 Manipulating normal appearances


11/22 Reputation and style


11/24 Public order, hegemony, and appearances
Read Scott chs 1-4
Due Paper update

11/29 Undermining the performative order
Read Scott chs 5-8

12/1 The thinkable and the doable: values and forms in cultural practice

Abu Ghraib documentation. TO BE DISTRIBUTED.

12/6  Final paper due