The Ethnography of Performance

English/CompStd 7350.02 Seminar in Folklore (29800, 30020, 30021)
Fall 2013

Tuesday 4:10-7:25 PM
Denney Hall 419

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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 instantiating 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, with its attention to bodies in motion, it is newly relevant as a corrective to the reification of values and 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. This course fulfills the core theory requirement of the Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization in Folklore. For more information, see http://cfs.osu.edu/programs/grad-options/gis-and-graduate-curriculum

REQUIRED READINGS
The readings are diverse in origin and a few are forbidding. Don't panic, but plow forward. We will talk them through. Readings marked LIBRARY will be found online through the journal or book title in the OSU library catalogue. (Note that journals are sometimes in multiple repositories depending on the years of publication.) Other readings will be on Carmen under Content, then Table of Contents, as PDFs.

The following books have been ordered at SBX: (look under Comp Studies, not English):
• Basso, Keith. 1979. Portraits of “the Whiteman.” Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS
All assignments must be completed as described below for a passing grade.

1. General presence, participation, and engagement. 20%

2. Two days opening class discussion. 15%

One or two students per session will get us started on most days by offering two or three comments and questions on the readings. (First come first serve: send me an email to sign up for dates.) What is the author’s agenda and context? To what kinds of purposes is his or her approach suited (or not), and how might we build on it or revise it usefully?

I ask that your remarks be relevant to the topic of the course and of the day (if the latter is unclear, please feel free to discuss it with me) and that they reflect a serious engagement with text and topic. In other words, don’t pick a minor point with which to quibble unless you feel ready to demonstrate that it points to one of our major concerns. Read critically but also with consideration of the context and charity for human imperfection.

3. A two- to three-page observation of the 10/10 performance of the Jindo Folk Performing Arts Company, presented by OSU’s Institute for Korean Studies (see schedule for further details). If you can’t attend, you may request (prior to these dates) to observe an alternative event. Due 10/14. 15%

4. A research paper. 50% total. Post the first three steps on Carmen under Discussions to share with the class. All steps of the process will count in the final grade, and late delivery will mean late feedback. The paper should of course demonstrate engagement with course discussions and readings, but is primarily meant to give you an opportunity to try out the approaches on your own material.

- A two-page sg-space close reading of some primary representation. Due 9/30.
- An informal discussion of your project with the class. We will space these out over the course, trying to make them relevant to the day’s topic. The class will read whatever you’ve already posted, and you’ll have a chance to pose questions and get feedback on your project. Email me to sign up for a date.
- Final paper. In Carmen dropbox. Due Monday 12/9. Ca. 12-15 doublespaced pages of well-shaped and stylish prose, plus bib and a one-page appendix discussing your research process, including roadblocks and what you’d like to have pursued if you’d had world enough and time.
SCHEDULE

8/27  Introduction: the performance turn in folklore, linguistics, and anthropology


*And, over the next few weeks, browse the following for ideas and bibliography:*


9/3  Ideologies and ethics of performance


I’ll order pizza.

9/9  Idea due

9/10  Special event on children’s play (recommended, not required)
Lecture by Anna Beresin, University of the Arts
"What We Kids Do": Children’s Folklore and the Study of the Schoolyard
260 Ramseyer Hall, 20 W. Woodruff
10:30 AM-12:00 PM, followed by lunch
9/10  Form, function, emergence, reflexivity


Bauman et al., Verbal Art as Performance.

9/17  Reading day

9/24  Frame and metacommunication


Basso, Portraits of “the Whiteman.”

9/30  Close reading due

10/1  Modelling, imitating, regulating

Read  Caillois, Man, Play, and Games.

10/8  Transformation


10/10  Special event: Jindo Folk Performing Arts Company, sponsored by the Institute for Korean Studies. Conference Theater, Ohio Union, 6:00-9:00 PM.

10/14  Performance observation due
10/15 Reading day (American Folklore Society Annual Meeting)

10/22 Trope, persuasion, representation


10/26 Special event (not required but highly recommended)
Metropolitan Opera HD Broadcast of Shostakovich’s *The Nose*, production by William Kentridge. 12:55 PM at the Lennox.

10/29 Inversion and the Carnivalesque


11/5  Formalization


11/12  Normal appearances and the self


11/18  Paper abstract due

11/19  Style, reputation, rebellion


Noyes, Dorothy 2000. “Authoring the Social Drama: Suicide and the Performance of Self in a French Political Scandal.” Narrative 8:210-231. LIBRARY -->


**11/26 Public order and hegemony**

Read Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance.*

**12/3 Exemplarity and scale**


TBD Virtuosity and connoisseurship

Movie viewing and dinner chez moi, conjoined with CS 5957.02 (Cultures of Waste and Recycling) students


**12/9 Final paper due**
COURSE POLICIES

Getting in touch with me Email is generally best, but to keep some hours for sleep and work I will not be checking it from 11 PM to 11 AM. In case of a morning emergency, please call my office number (292-8683).

Hearing from me Please make sure that my emails will not go into your spam folder. I will send individual messages to your OSU email address, but post general announcements on Carmen. See the Discussion page for session-by-session info, e.g. notes on updated readings; see the front Announcements page for emergencies such as class cancellation.

Office hours W 2:30-4:00, Th 2-4:30 at the Mershon Center, 104A, 1501 Neil Ave. (corner of 8th and Neil), 292-8683. Or by appointment. Note that I pay the interdisciplinarity tax by going to lots of meetings, so always check Carmen for the possibility of rescheduled office hours; it’s also a good idea to let me know when you’re coming if possible. But do come see me, and please come especially if you are feeling frustrated with the coursework or need accommodation for some kind of difficulty.

Plagiarism. 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. Especially when doing research on the Internet, be extremely careful to credit your sources appropriately (come to me if you are not certain how to do this). And bear in mind that it is much less work to do your own thinking than to plagiarize convincingly.

Disability resources. The Office for Disability Services, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact the ODS at 2-3307. If you require accommodation to do the work of the course, please let me know immediately.

Class Cancellation. In the unlikely event of class cancellation due to emergency, I will contact you via email and request that a note on department letterhead be placed on the door. In addition, I will contact you as soon as possible following the cancellation to let you know what will be expected of you for our next class meeting.