Expressive Culture: Performance
Professor Barbara Browning  bb5@nyu.edu
Preceptors: Hyun Joo Lee (hjl228@nyu.edu) and Eser Selen (es744@nyu.edu)
Lecture: M and W 9:30-10:45
Recitations: Th 2-3:15; Th 3:30-4:45; F 9:30-10:45; F 11-12:15

This course examines performance as both a practice and a theoretical tool with which to understand the construction of social identities. The broad spectrum of performance will be explored by means of lectures, documented and lived performances. Students will be asked to analyze theater, music, and dance performances, as well as religious and social spectacles. We will ask in particular how the staging (formal or informal) of these events frames our understanding of the ethnic, class or gender identities being acted out.

PERFORMANCE IN THEORY

W 1/21  Introduction
M 1/26  Between Theatre and Anthropology (readings: Richard Schechner, “Points of Contact between Anthropological and Theatrical Thought”; Coco Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance”)
W 1/28  Screening: “Couple in a Cage”
M 2/2   Performance and Performativity (readings: JL Austin, How to Do Things With Words, lectures 1 and 2; Judith Butler, “Critically Queer”; José Muñoz, “Jack’s Plunger”)
W 2/4   Screening: “Cornered”

THEATER

M 2/9   Classicism/Interculturalism (readings: Friedrich Nietzsche, from The Birth of Tragedy; Antonin Artaud, “On the Balinese Theatre” and “Oriental Theatre and Western Theatre”; Rustom Bharucha, “Somebody’s Other”)
W 2/11  Screening: “Dionysus in ‘69”
M 2/16  NO CLASS (however, during the long weekend, or on another day this week, please spend an hour in Washington Square Park observing various performers—musicians, acrobats and comedians, if they’re out, but also chess players, dog walkers, drug dealers...)
W 2/18  Street Theatre (readings: from Sally Harrison-Pepper, Circle in the Square; Ngugi wa Th’iongo, “Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space”)

SOCIAL SPECTACLE

M 2/23  Carnival (readings: Mikhail Bakhtin, “Carnival Ambivalence”; George Lipsitz, “Mardi Gras Indians”)
W 2/25  Screening: “Jazz Parades”
RITUAL PERFORMANCE

M 3/8  Rituals of Incorporation (readings: Barbara Browning, “The Closed Body”; Anna Deavere Smith, interview with Carol Martin; Richard Schechner, “Acting as Incorporation”)
W 3/10  Screening: “Fires in the Mirror”

[SPRING BREAK]

W 3/24  Installation: The Fetish

VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE

M 3/29  Cyber Identities (readings: Julian Dibbell, from My Tiny Life; Barbara Browning, “Cyberspace, Voodoo Sex, and Retroviral Identity”)
W 3/31  Performance: TBA

DANCE

M 4/5  Ballet and the Choreography of Gender (readings: Susan Foster, “The Ballerina’s Phallic Pointe”; André Lepecki, “Dance and Difference”)
W 4/7  Screening: Matthew Bourne’s “Swan Lake”
M 4/12  Contact Improv/Capoeira (readings: Cynthia Novack, from Sharing the Dance; Barbara Browning, “Headspin”)
W 4/14  Performance: Guest Artist

MUSIC

M 4/19  The Grain of the Voice (readings: Roland Barthes, “The Phantoms of the Opera”; Wayne Koestenbaum, from The Queen’s Throat; Allen Weiss, liner notes to John Cage, Empty Words)
W 4/21  Listening: “Empty Words”
W 4/28  Screening: “Sabbath in Paradise”
M 5/3  Performance: Guest Artist (no paper required on this performance)
Note: the photocopied reader for this course is available for purchase at Advanced Copy Center, 552 Laguardia Place (near W. 3rd Street), 212-388-1001. Two copies of the reader will also be on reserve at Bobst Library.

Course requirements: Attendance at all lectures and recitations; a short (1-2 page) paper on either the readings or the performance under consideration in a given week, to be handed in at the recitation that week; engaged participation in class discussion. At the end of the semester (at the last class meeting on 5/3), you should resubmit the entire portfolio of short papers to your preceptor with any revisions you choose to make.

Grades: portfolio of papers 75%; participation in class discussion 25%.