

# Performance Ethnography

SOAN 270  
Spring 2019

Prof. Meryl Lauer  
T/Th: 10:10-11:55am  
Leighton 304

Office Hours: M 11am-1pm  
W 1-2:30pm  
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“If you learn to be a psychoanalyst, and you're working as a psychoanalyst, your job is in that context. If you're a baker, making bread, you're a baker. If you make the best bread in the world, you're not an artist, but if you bake the bread in the gallery, you're an artist. So the context makes the difference. And my context is art.”

--Marina Abramović  
*Interview Magazine 2012*



## COURSE DESCRIPTION

From the [Pussy Riot](#) trials in Russia to [Beyoncé's](#) 2016 performance at the Country Music Awards, from the seeming mass appeal of [Hamilton](#) to the racist stereotypes in [The Nutcracker](#), cultural politics are central to how people create and consume art. As early as the 20<sup>th</sup> century, anthropologists have paid close attention to staged performances as they distill complex cultural systems of meaning and meaning-making. Simultaneously, the theoretical offerings of performance-making provide anthropologists unique ways to understand everyday relationships and interactions. In this class we address the multiple modes of performance deployed by ethnography.

In this class we ask: What are the choreographies of everyday life? How do we perform cultural notions of race, class, or gender? What do formal performance practices such as athletics or dance tell us about our larger social worlds? At the intersection of performance studies and anthropology, this class takes on the aesthetic, political, economic, and social dimensions of performance. We will explore both the spectacular and mundane performances that bring to the fore the forms of discipline and control that shape people's lives around the world.

## GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS

### **Participation & Attendance (20%)**

At Carleton, we are lucky to have small classes where students and professors can critically engage each other and class material in a substantial manner. But, that can only happen if we come to class, come to class prepared, and contribute to class in an effective manner. We will collaborate to decide what preparedness and effectiveness mean in our classroom at the beginning of the term.

You are expected to be present in class on a regular basis; failure to do so will adversely affect your grade. *If you are more than five minutes late or if you leave before the conclusion of class without prior permission, you will be counted absent.*

### **Leading Class Discussion (20%)**

You and at least one other student will be responsible for leading class discussion on one week's readings. Most Thursdays, the second half of class is reserved for student led discussion. Leading class discussion had a number of components. You should develop a set of discussion questions (not more than three) to distribute via e-mail or Moodle news forum *no later than 5:00pm on the day before your session*. You should also *bring copies* of the question to *hand out in class*. The discussion questions should draw out the theoretical significance of the week's readings. Feel free to experiment with format, including debates, role plays, or cases. As a team, you should *read one extra anthropology or performance studies article* related to the week's topic, and (together) prepare a *ten-minute* (not more!) presentation discussing this article and introducing the discussion questions. The supplemental reading should enhance our understanding an aspect of the unit's topic and make you an "expert" for the day.

I encourage and expect teams of discussants to cooperate and coordinate your discussion leading. Discussants are required to meet with me as a group either during office hours or by special appointment one or two days before your session. Before we meet, you should have found and read your supplemental article, completed a first draft of your discussion questions, and thought about a pedagogical plan for your segment of the class session. This requires considerable advance planning. We will use the meetings to chat about the topic and how your supplemental reading intersects with course readings, refine the questions, and talk about discussion leading strategies.

### **Critical Performance Analyses (2/15%):**

For this assignment, you will write a critical analysis of a performance that you either participate in or attend. Your chosen performance should be fairly formal, but if you have any questions about the suitability of your choice, I am more than happy to discuss it with you. The goal of this assignment is for you to apply your theoretical and academic knowledge to your everyday life.

Your paper should have an argumentative thesis and answer the following questions:

- What performance did you go to? What happened? Where did it happen? Who was there? Who performed? Provide a “thick” description of your experience.
- What themes or concepts from class materials resonate with you when you reflect on the performance?
- What specific readings (**at minimum, two**) from class can you relate to the performance?
- How do the readings’ arguments help you understand the performance or give you a new way of looking at it?
- What conclusions do you come to when you analyze the performance and your readings together? Perhaps you can illuminate a central concept from class (e.g. performance, politics, race, gender, social hierarchy).

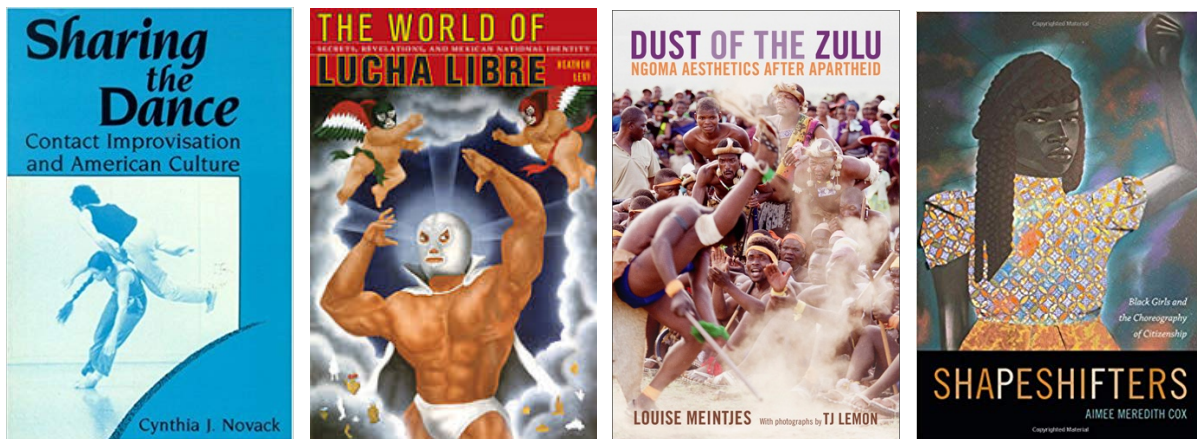
### **Key words Project (30%):**

Your final paper will be a “key word” essay that summarizes a central concept from the class and draws from a multitude of class materials to trace its importance in the academic context. You will choose your key word from a provided list of options and model your essay after the key word entries we will read from *Key words for American Cultural Studies*. We will discuss this project in more detail in class.

## GRADE SCALE:

A+ 97-100%	C+ 77-79%
A 93-96%	C 73-76%
A- 90-92%	C- 70-72%
B+ 87-89%	D+ 67-69%
B 83-86%	D 63-66%
B- 80-82%	D- 60-62%
	F < 60%

## REQUIRED TEXTS:



1. Novack, Cynthia. 1990. *Sharing the dance: Contact improvisation and American culture*. University of Wisconsin Press.
2. Levi, Heather. 2008. *The World of Lucha Libre: Secret, Revelations, and Mexican National Identity*. Duke University Press.
3. Meintjes, Louise. 2017. *Dust of the Zulu: Ngoma Aesthetics After Apartheid*. Duke University Press.
4. Cox, Aimee Meredith. 2015. *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*. Duke University Press.

## COURSE MATERIALS ASSISTANCE

I recognize the potential financial burden of books and printing. If you need assistance to cover course expenses, please speak with me.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to adhere to Carleton's code of academic honesty. Even in the event of participating in team projects, your final work should still reflect your own ideas and other people's ideas should always be credited. If you have any questions regarding this policy please visit <http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/doc/integrity/> or come speak to me.

Failure to follow Carleton's expectation will result in a failing grade and formal action with the administration.

### **LATE AND MAKE-UP POLICY**

Please note that I am very strict about due dates. Unless you have a legitimate excuse for turning in an assignment late or missing an exam, I will either not accept the assignment or deduct points from your grade. Although I am certainly sympathetic to emergencies, I do ask you to try to let me know what is happening before the assignment or exam comes around in order to avoid misunderstandings.

### **ACCOMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Carleton College is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Services office (Henry House, 107 Union Street) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations. If you have, or think you may have, a disability (e.g., mental health, attentional, learning, autism spectrum disorders, chronic health, traumatic brain injury and concussions, vision, hearing, mobility, or speech impairments), please contact [disability@carleton.edu](mailto:disability@carleton.edu) or call Jan Foley, Student Accessibility Specialist (x4464) or Chris Dallager, Director of Disability Services (x5250) to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

### **WRITING ASSISTANCE**

The Writing Center, located in 420 4th Libe, has peer writing consultants who can work with you during any stage of the writing process (brainstorming to final proofreading). Hours and more information can be found on the writing center website. You can reserve specific times for conferences in 420 4th Libe by using their online appointment system. Walk-ins are welcome, though writers with appointments have priority.

If you are a second language writer and believe you might benefit from working individually with a writing consultant on a regular basis this term, email Renata Fitzpatrick, Multilingual Writing Coordinator, call her at x5998, or stop by her office in 420D 4th Libe. She can arrange once- or twice-a-week meetings between you and a writing consultant throughout the term.

### **STUDENT HEALTH**

Peabody urges you to make yourself—your own health and well-being—your priority throughout this term and your career here. If you are having difficulties maintaining your well-being, feel free to contact me and/or pursue other resources, such as the Student Health and Wellness Service Center or the Counseling Center at Johns Hopkins.

## CREATING AN INCLUSIVE & COMPASSIONATE CLASSROOM

My primary goal as an educator and a scholar is to foster a joy for learning and prepare students for their future professional paths. Although joyful, the process is not necessarily always fun or easy. Learning is a convoluted process that is difficult, as it requires us to push our intellectual limits, take risks, and face our—and others’—legacies straight on. The “reward” that results from this process is not always readily apparent and it may take years to manifest.

I also believe that learning should not be painful or hurtful to those involved in the process. I can assure you that I make a conscious effort to consider the possible consequences or impacts of what happens in my courses. The problem is that even though I try to avoid these situations, it is very difficult for anyone to be error-free. Trying to accommodate or predict the reactions of a diverse and ever-changing group of individuals that venture to take my classes is impossible and overwhelming at times.

For these reasons, a belief in the academic process and a commitment to creating a compassionate learning space, I avoid an explicit policy of providing trigger warnings in my courses. I will give some background of the readings and will certainly give a heads up when certain kinds of difficult material approaches but I will not give trigger warnings. In a nutshell, the fundamental reason is that what might *to you* merit an obvious trigger warning may not be for others and vice versa. For example, a common occurrence in my courses is that issues of sexual violence depicted in a North American context will elicit multiple requests for trigger warning, yet material that discusses extreme cases of violence and genocide in regions of the world that we refer to as the Global South are consumed by most with a dry analytical stance and almost no consideration or acknowledgement of the emotional implications this may have to others in the room (including the instructor or visitor).

This is a very delicate issue and there is no magic bullet. What I ask you is to engage in this journey with me and trust me (and this may mean giving me or your peers multiple chances). I will definitely address issues that are brought to my attention in a constructive manner. I do my best to teach and model the manner in which difficult material can be engaged within the classroom, but more importantly please know that ***I am willing to learn with you, but this can only happen in a compassionate and honest environment.*** I hope you are willing to learn with me as well!

## READING SCHEDULE

- Assigned readings are due in class on the day listed.
- Please bring a copy of the readings to class IN HARD COPY.
- All readings, podcasts, and required films will be posted online.
- This schedule is subject to change. Please check one our class webpage for the most up-to-date readings and assignments. Any changes will also be announced in class or via email.

### Week 1 *What is Performance?*

2-Apr Introduction

4-Apr Chapter 1 in Schechner, Richard. 2002. *Performance Studies: an introduction*. Routledge.  
Foster, Susan. 2003. "Choreographies of Protest." *Theatre Journal* 55 (3): 395-412.

### Week 2 *Performing the Political*

9-Apr Novack, Cynthia. 1990. *Sharing the dance: Contact improvisation and American culture*. University of Wisconsin Press.  
Selections from Goldman, Danielle. 2010. *I Want to Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom*. University of Michigan Press.

11-Apr **No Class**

### Week 3 *Performing the Political/Sport and Spectacle*

16-Apr Novack, Cynthia. 1990. *Sharing the dance: Contact improvisation and American culture*. University of Wisconsin Press.  
Foucault, M. 1987. "The ethic of the care for the self as a practice of freedom: An interview with Michael Foucault on 20th January 1984." In *The Final Foucault*, ed. James William Bernauer & David M. Rasmussen. MIT Press.

18-Apr Levi, Heather. 2008. *The World of Lucha Libre: Secrest, Revelations, and Mexican National Identity*. Duke University Press.  
Selections from Klein, Allen. 1993. *Little Big Men: Bodybuilding Subculture and Gender Construction*. SUNY Press.

### Week 4 *Sport and Spectacle*

23-Apr Levi, Heather. 2008. *The World of Lucha Libre: Secrest, Revelations, and Mexican National Identity*. Duke University Press.

25-Apr Levi, Heather. 2008. *The World of Lucha Libre: Secrest, Revelations, and Mexican National Identity*. Duke University Press.

**Week 5** *Performance, Precarity, and Identity*

30-Apr **Flex Day**

2-May Meintjes, Louise. 2017. *Dust of the Zulu: Ngoma Aesthetics After Apartheid*. Duke University Press.  
Manning, Susan. 2014. "Performance." In *Keywords for American cultural studies*, 2nd ed., B. Burgett, & G. Hendler eds., New York University Press.

**Week 6** *Performance, Precarity, and Identity*

7-May Meintjes, Louise. 2017. *Dust of the Zulu: Ngoma Aesthetics After Apartheid*. Duke University Press.  
Comaroff, Jean and John Comaroff. 1987. "The Madman and the Migrant: Work and Labor in the Historical Consciousness of a South African People." *American Ethnologist*, 14(2):191-209.

9-May Meintjes, Louise. 2017. *Dust of the Zulu: Ngoma Aesthetics After Apartheid*. Duke University Press.

**Week 7** *Art and Activism*

14-May Selections from Gill, Lyndon. (2018). *Erotic Islands*. Duke University Press.  
Lorde, Audre. 1984. "Poetry is not a luxury" and "Uses of the Erotic." In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. New York: Quality Paper Book.

16-May **Flex Day**

**Week 8** *Art and Activism*

21-May Selections from Gill, Lyndon. (2018). *Erotic Islands*. Duke University Press.

23-May Cox, Aimee Meredith. 2015. *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*. Duke University Press.

**Week 9** *Performance Studies beyond Performance*

28-May Cox, Aimee Meredith. 2015. *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*. Duke University Press.



30-May Cox, Aimee Meredith. 2015. *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*. Duke University Press.

**Week 10** *Performance Studies beyond Performance*

4-Jun **Flex Day**