



English 2202F: Performance Beyond Theatres

Fall 2014

T/Th 12:30-2:30; 11:30-12:30

Professor Kim Solga

ksolga@uwo.ca

1. Course Description

Performance isn't just for actors at the theatre; we are all performing, all over the place, all the time. Not convinced? Just you wait.

Since the 1960s, scholars and makers of theatre have been exploring a vast array of performances of "everyday life", from church services to hockey games to the way you flirt when you're out at the bar. "Performance Studies" is the discipline dedicated to thinking about how performance works outside the carefully stage-managed four walls of the theatre; Performance Beyond Theatres is the course that will introduce you to the many ways we might usefully conceive of performance as a part of our quotidian being in the world – and to the many socially and politically significant reasons *why* thinking about performance in this way can help us to become more active, engaged, community-minded citizens.

2. Meet your Teaching Team

Instructor: Dr Kim Solga (ksolga@uwo.ca; 519 661 2111 x80118)

Kim's office and hours: Ivey 3G14; Tuesdays 3pm-5pm; Thursdays 1pm-2pm

I will be inviting you to come visit me in my office during the first weeks of term; this is a chance for us to get to know one another, for me to understand your goals for the course and for the year, and (most important) for you to figure out where my office is! Don't be nervous: it's not a test. (And: I have tea and a very comfy couch.)

3. Our course on the web

We will use our OWL portal for basic info and tasks, including assignment submission; for reflections (especially around performance) we will use <http://PerformanceStudiesAtWestern.wordpress.com>. I'll also be asking each of you to create your own blogs (see below) to chronicle your discoveries during the term, and you will link those to our class hub.

Meanwhile, if you'd like to know more about my research and teaching, please visit me at <http://theactivistclassroom.wordpress.com>.

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4. Objectives and Outcomes

An outcome is a (sometimes abstract) thing we would like to take away from our course, at the end of the year. An objective is a (usually more concrete) thing we will do in service of our intended outcomes. You've already encountered my overarching goal for the course: to help you understand how performance studies can aid us in becoming more critically aware and active citizens out in the world. But I have some other goals for the course, too:

Outcomes

Students who take our course seriously and commit to our shared labour can expect to:

- be introduced to a host of important contemporary performance theories and practices;
- develop the capacity to critique a piece of non-scripted, non-traditional performance;
- examine, discuss, and debate performance ethics;
- develop strong collaborative (team-work) skills;
- continue to improve their research, writing, and editing skills;
- practice, develop, and improve public presentation skills;
- learn to ask really good, nuanced questions;
- take some risks, make some useful mistakes, and have fun.

Objectives

In order to achieve the above outcomes, students should expect to:

- read widely in performance studies as per the schedule of readings below;
- view a variety of performance events, both as part of our shared, scheduled work AND independently (I'll be asking you to keep your eye out for "performance" everywhere you go, all term long);
- write regularly, in order to get comfortable with writing stuff that's *not* an essay: blog posts, position papers, in-class exercises, and peer feedback;
- practice speaking in front of the class regularly, including in a final in-class presentation and in a mock session where we will practice our formal presentation skills together;
- undertake regular performance-research and performance-making exercises, including for your final presentation, in order to explore the challenges and rewards of "everyday performance" in a practical way.

These are the aims and objectives I've set for us. What are yours, though? **Do you have a goal for yourself for this course?** I encourage you to make one; we'll talk more about this during our first session together.

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5. Required Texts

Performance: A Critical Introduction (Marvin Carlson, Second ed., 2003)

The Performance Studies Reader (Edited by Henry Bial, Second ed., 2007)

You can buy these from the Bookstore at Western, or online; just remember that Amazon is not the only online retailer worth your time and money!

I've also had copies of these books placed on reserve at the library; if you need to, you can do all your reading there, or photocopy what you need. Just remember that it's not good practice (in fact, it's against copyright law) to photocopy more than 10% or one full chapter of a book; if you truly need to copy more than that, come and see me and we can talk about cost-effective strategies for getting your reading done.

In addition to the readings set out below, we will be doing a variety of performance-watching, both online and in person, throughout the term. See the week-by-week breakdown below for all the details.

6. Assessment

1) *The Basics*

Your grade in English 2202F will consist of the following parts:

- position paper 1 (10%; 1000 words; individual mark)
- position paper 2 (10%; 1000 words; individual mark)
- final presentation (performance event + in-class presentation) (20%; group mark)
- your personal performance blog (15%; individual mark)
- participation (15%; individual mark)
- final exam (take-home) (30%; individual mark)

Your due dates are as follows:

- position paper 1 (Friday, 10 October, via OWL)
- position paper 2 (Friday, 14 November, via OWL)
- final performance + presentation (week of 25+27 November IN CLASS)
- personal performance blogs (complete by Wednesday, 3 December)
- final take-home exam (Friday, 12 December via OWL)

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PLEASE NOTE the following policy as set out by The University of Western Ontario:

STUDENTS MUST PASS BOTH TERM WORK AND THE FINAL EXAMINATION (IN COURSES WITH FINAL EXAMINATIONS) IN ORDER TO PASS THE COURSE. STUDENTS WHO FAIL THE FINAL EXAMINATION (REGARDLESS OF THEIR TERM MARK) AUTOMATICALLY FAIL THE COURSE.

I must receive all your term work no later than 72 hours before the final exam is due in order for you to be eligible to pass the term and complete the final exam.

II) The Specifics

POSITION PAPER 1: this paper asks you to examine in detail one of the readings we will have discussed during the first few weeks of class. What does the author claim about the nature of performance? Can you think of a recent “performance event” you have observed in your world that confirms, or disputes, the author’s claims? More information about this paper will be forthcoming on Thursday 2 October.

POSITION PAPER 2: this paper asks you to select a reading from the Bial text that we have *not* looked at together in class, and to discuss that reading in relation to one of our shared readings. Are the authors in agreement? Do they offer differing claims about their related topics? Does a debate emerge between them, and if so, where do you stand? More information about this paper will be forthcoming on Thursday 6 November.

FINAL PERFORMANCE AND PRESENTATION: For this final project, you will get into pairs and develop a public performance intervention somewhere at Western. These might be for a large, ad-hoc audience; they might be “flash mob” style; or they might be intimate, one-to-one performances that you create just for our class. The only rule is that your piece must be 15 minutes long, that it must engage with a topical issue of importance to your pair, and that you must be prepared to show it on our “performance day”, Tuesday 25 November. Then, in our Thursday hour on 27 November, your pair will offer a 10-minute presentation detailing your goals, strategies, and research for the piece you presented. You should also be prepared to take a few questions from the rest of us about your performance and presentation (5-10 minutes’ worth). All of these things – performance, presentation, and Q&A – will form part of your final grade for the assignment. We’ll talk much more about this task in the week after Fall Study Break.

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YOUR PERSONAL PERFORMANCE BLOG: By the end of week three, Thursday 18 September, you will have set up a personal blog (ideally at WordPress.com, so it can link to our class blog site) to chronicle your thoughts about our readings, viewings, and any other performances you witness throughout the term.

You should write one post per week, for a total of 12 posts, and all should be complete by Wednesday 3 December.

Your posts can be short; they can be a series of links and images with a few added observations; or they can be longer and textually detailed (though remember that an ideal blog post is about 1000 words or less – your audience isn't necessarily scholarly!).

For this assignment, I won't be judging spelling and grammar, but remember that these blogs are technically "public", so do consider spending a bit of time on clear writing and presentation.

What does Kim want? I'm interested in observing how well you engage with, and extend, the stuff we talk about in class when you have time to reflect on that stuff outside of class, in your world around and beyond Western. So be reflective, and perceptive. I'm also interested in letting you be as creative as you wish to be on your blog! This is a chance for you to let your interests, and your own personality, really shine through.

PARTICIPATION: We are a small group, so participation matters much more in Performance Beyond Theatres than it might in another class. We are a learning team; I'm the guide, and I'll help us all to make sense of the tricky and confusing things, but together we will *teach each other* a good deal of what we need to know each week.

Every class will feature informal presentations from students on key people, performance groups, and ideas; we will assign next week's presenters the week previous, and presentation roles will rotate fairly and as evenly as possible.

Presenters will be expected to do some light research online and at the library, and then will bring about five minutes' worth of information to share with the class. Ideally, you'll also bring at least one good question for discussion, based on the material you've found.

Participation can be a nebulous thing to grade, but not here: all I'm looking for is your *effort*, your *engagement*, your *willingness*, and your *curiosity*. Being "wrong" does not matter - it's all part of learning! If you come to class prepared each day, and if you complete your presentation tasks every time you are assigned that role, you will receive 100% for participation.

FINAL EXAM: ours will be a take-home affair. More information will be forthcoming in the final weeks of the course; we will collaborate on making it a meaningful, useful experience for everyone!

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III) Submission rules for written assignments

- papers should be submitted via OWL no later than 11:55pm on the due date.
- late papers are penalized at 2% per day.
- if you would like to take the weekend for papers due on Friday, you may do so; **you will be penalized a flat rate of 3%**. You decide if it's worth it to you. There's no reason to request this extension formally; it's simply there if you want it.
- **I am unable to grant further extensions for any reason.** If you have a medical or other compassionate reason for needing an extension, please follow this policy:
 - *Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. **Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.***
 - *Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf*
 - *The full policy is set out here: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf*
- All written material you pass in must be your own work, with all references clearly documented. **PLAGIARISM, defined as "The act or an instance of copying or stealing another's words or ideas and attributing them as one's own," is a serious academic offense, and may be punishable with sanctions up to and including expulsion from the university.** Please refer to the Calendar's section on "Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students" for more information; please see one of us if you are unsure whether or not you are citing a source properly.
- In cases where I suspect an offense may have occurred I reserve the right to submit your papers to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to Western. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system.

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IV) Course-specific assessment guidelines

How do I get an A on my written* papers? The English Department has a set of marking guidelines that you are free to seek out anytime, and that professors use to ensure that our marking practices are as consistent and as fair as possible. In this class, however, written papers that achieve high (B/B+/A/A+) grades will generally feature the following characteristics (executed sometimes well, sometimes superbly):

- **A clear and sustained argument, supported by a strong thesis statement.** Clear and sustained arguments are built from strong thesis statements; they help to structure your paper clearly and frame the case you are trying to make.
- **A solid, well considered structure.** Spend time thinking about how you will organize your argument and slot your research into it. Essays structured loosely give the impression of having been poorly thought through, something that will inevitably influence your grade negatively. Essays structured well *flow well*, allowing an argument to build clearly and convincingly over the course of the paper; this gives the opposite impression and has the opposite effect (the effect you want!).
- **Close readings of your case studies (whether articles, or performance).** A close reading involves paying careful attention to the details of those subjects; your essays should feature sustained focus on your primary subject matter, and plenty of contextualized quotations from it/them whenever possible.
- **Valid and useful definitions of key terms**, especially those that are new to you, which are not self-evident, that you wish to re-define for the purposes of your argument, or that are potentially contentious. When in doubt, define!
- **Proper grammar, use of punctuation, and technical presentation, including a Works Cited list and citations created using the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (English Department style).** Don't forget to copyedit your essay before you hit print or send! If your essay is full of small mistakes – *especially* in your Works Cited, my pet peeve! – I will know you rushed the work, and your grade will be affected.

*Presentations are a different beast. We will talk much more in class after Fall Study Break about what is expected of your final performances and presentations; we will also hold a “mock” presentation session late in November, and will use a shared marking grid to clarify the strengths and weaknesses of our labour as part of that session. By the time your final presentation day arrives, you will understand exactly what you need to do to earn a good grade!

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7. Week by week schedule

Readings and viewings are listed under the day we will first discuss them. They are boldfaced for ease of reference.

Week 1 (4 September)

Thursday: *Our first introduction to the course; what the heck is “performance beyond theatres”?*

Week 2 (9+11 September)

Syllabus discussion and questions, plus lots of key terms and preliminary basics; understanding performance studies as a discipline, plus learning to ask a good question about performance in the world outside the theatre.

Tuesday: **Please read your syllabus thoroughly! ALSO: Carlson**, “Introduction: what is performance?” (1-7); **Schechner**, “Performance Studies: the broad spectrum approach” (Bial 7-9)

Thursday: **Kirshenblatt-Gimblett**, “Performance Studies” (Bial 43-55)

Week 3 (16+18 September)

Performance and ethnography: using performance to figure out “culture”

Tuesday: **Carlson**, “The performance of culture” (11-30); **Turner**, “Liminality and Communitas” (Bial 79-87)

Thursday: Bring your own performance event! **For today’s class**, you’ll go out into the world and bring back documentation about a cultural performance you’ve observed on your own.

Week 4 (23+25 September)

Social performances; making sense of the social “spectacle”

Tuesday: **Carlson**, “Performance in Society” (31-55); **Goffman**, “Performances: belief in the part one is playing” (Bial 59-63)

Thursday: **Barack Obama’s acceptance speech**, November 2008 (please watch ahead of class, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnvUUauFJ98>).

Week 5 (30 September + 2 October)

Performative acts make the world go ‘round!

Tuesday: **Obama** continued; **Carlson**, “The performance of language” (56-80); **J.L. Austin**, “How to do things with Words” (Bial 147-53)

Also on Tuesday, we’ll plan our upcoming field trip to Toronto for Nuit Blanche!

Thursday: **Kate and Wills’ royal wedding** (please watch ahead of class, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53UaRWIIVh4>).

Also on Thursday, you’ll receive more information about your position paper #1

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****SATURDAY 4 OCTOBER: class visit to Toronto for Nuit Blanche 2014!**

Week 6 (7+9 October)

Performance, site, and text: dancing in the streets

Tuesday: full discussion of our Nuit Blanche experience; **Carlson**, "Performance in its historical context" (83-109); **Levin and Solga**, "Zombies in Condoland" (I will make this available on OWL for us ahead of time; it's short, so don't panic.)

Thursday: **Worthen**, "Disciplines of the text: sites of performance" (Bial 10-25)

Week 7 (14+16 October)

Performance and "live" art: crossing between the performing and visual arts

Tuesday: **Carlson**, "Performance art" (110-34); introduction to **Guillermo Gomez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra** (take a good look around: <http://www.pochanostra.com>)

Thursday: **La Pocha Nostra** cont; **Gomez-Peña**, "Culturas-in-extremis" (Bial 287-98)

Week 8 (21+23 October)

Performance techniques and strategies: beyond the normal at the theatre

Tuesday: **Carlson**, "Performance and the postmodern" (137-56); **Brecht**, "A dialogue about acting" (Bial 185-7); **Strasberg**, "A dream of passion" (Bial 195-6)

Thursday: making sense of Brecht, Strasberg, and the "realism" wars; **The Wooster Group** (take a good look around: <http://thewoostergroup.org/blog/>)

Week 9 (28 October; 30 October IS STUDY BREAK)

Take a dance break!

Tuesday: more Woosters; making sense of the last crazy two weeks; catching up on things that have gone *loco*. Perhaps cake. And maybe we'll even break early!

Week 10 (4+6 November)

Performance and identity: staging ourselves, as we wish to be seen and heard!

Tuesday: **Carlson**, "Performance and identity" (157-78); **Butler**, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (Bial 154-66)

Also on Tuesday: we'll talk more about the upcoming final performances and presentations.

Thursday: **Butler** continued; **Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan**, aka Finger in the Dyke (take a good look around at http://fingerinthedyke.ca/video_film.html)

Also on Thursday: you'll receive more information about position paper #2

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Week 11 (11+13 November)

Performance and interculturalism: acting against racism and cultural oppression

Tuesday: **Carlson**, “Cultural Performance” (179-204); **Conquergood**, “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research” (Bial 311-22)

Thursday: **Coco Fusco**, “The Feminist Future” (please watch ahead of class at <http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/16/161>). This work is part of Fusco’s *Operation Atropos* project; if you’d like some context for what you are seeing and hearing on the video, you can read much more about the larger project at http://hemisphericinstitute.org/journal/3.1/eng/artist_presentation/cocofusco/)

Week 12 (18-20 November)

Tuesday: **mock presentation day!** No preparation is required for today’s session; I will set each of your final presentation groups a text to work on, and we will have time in class to prepare our mock presentations, practice them in front of one another, practice assessing our own and one another’s work, and debrief it all.

Thursday: **catch-our-breath day!** Chances are we have fallen behind, and that something (if only just one thing!) has fallen by the wayside. Today we catch up, and we practice asking good questions about what’s still confusing us.

Week 13 (25+27 November)

Tuesday: **performance event day!** Our entire session today will be dedicated to observing one another’s performance events around campus.

Thursday: **final presentations, part 1**

Week 14 (2 December)

Tuesday: **final presentations, part 2**; fun with the **final exam**; cake and a hearty farewell!

Thanks for being part of the class!

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