Performing Identity

Identity: we use this word every day.

But what *is* identity and how has our contemporary understanding of this concept been forged through theatrical performance? Pairing key theoretical and critical texts with play and performance texts, we'll explore how theatrical performance reflects, refracts, and refutes our contemporary understanding of identity. The fraught relationship between texts and bodies will be a key site of our investigation. We will think on our feet, as well as on the page. Expect to perform, write, and read critically. Expect to attend three performances, and to create your own. Expect to be challenged, extended, perplexed, thrilled. Expect!

Course Structure and Assignments

You will be expected to read one play (due every Monday), and to read several meaty pieces of theory and criticism (due every Wednesday) each week. The plays are listed on the syllabus, and can be purchased in the bookstore; the other texts will be distributed in class on Mondays. You will also be expected to attend three plays, two on campus and one off-campus. Here’s what we’ll be doing with all this:

Reading Journal and Weekly Précis

You are required to keep a reading journal, in which you write both your initial notes on and responses to all the texts we read, and your weekly précis (due every Wednesday). Your reading journal is a whopping 30% of your final grade and receives check (plus or minus) as warranted. It will be collected at random points throughout the semester. You will receive a check minus if you don’t have your notebook on the day it’s collected.

A précis is a reading essay that precisely and rigorously analyses the claims of a given text(s). It is quite a different beast than an opinion piece or a research essay. You must read closely, within the protocols of the text. I will provide weekly guidelines regarding the focus of your précis. As our course progresses, I will ask you to use your précis to put the plays and performances in conversation with the critical theories we read. Occasionally, these will take the form of more playful, ‘creative’ exercises. Some will involve performing.

Keep all of these together, dated, in a journal. It may include your handwritten reading notes, but *must* include a typed weekly précis. I will provide precise guidelines for the précis during the second week of class. Your performance in your reading journal constitutes 30% of your class grade, so be diligent, rigorous, and creative in your weekly missives. BRING YOUR JOURNAL TO EVERY CLASS---remember: I will collect them randomly and frequently.

Monday Working Group Discussion/Performances
You (along with other students) will be in charge of leading two forty-five minute presentations devoted to two of our Monday’s play or performance texts. You are expected, in keeping with our class’s themes, to attend to both the creative and the analytical dimensions of the assigned texts.

For the analytical portion, you are charged with forming complex, textually informed questions. You will be expected to POST THREE KEY QUESTIONS EACH on Blackboard by Sunday at 8 pm. Make sure to cite specific lines and scenes (with page numbers!) to support your claims and questions, and help us read more closely, rather than generalizing. The SPECIFICITY and QUALITY of your questions is key! Feel free to explore innovative pedagogies during the discussion section—you may have us discuss in pairs, small groups, or in even more inventive ways. Do not provide answers—just questions!

For the creative portion, think about how you can use live performance and performativity to raise theoretical and critical questions. It is not enough to merely ‘perform the text’—you need to bring a critical, questioning eye to it (one that doesn't merely provide a negative critique, either!). TAKE RISKS. You will be graded on the questions you ask, how well you move the class towards a more profound understanding of the texts, how well you respond to questions, how well your questions are connected to each other, and how effectively and creatively you employ performance as a critical lens. This grade will also be affected by your attendance, focus, and participation in all of the classes over the course of the semester (30% of final grade). (If you are presenting, you do not have to complete a précis for that day’s reading; instead, reflect in writing in your journal on what happened during your presentation—how you prepared, what you learned, what surprised you, what you expected vs. what happened.)

Wednesday Theory/Performance Days
Wednesdays will be dedicated to further discussion/performative exploration of the play or performance in question, and a thorough exploration of the assigned theoretical texts. I will distribute the readings for Wednesday on the previous Monday. The purpose of our Wednesday conversations is to tease out the relationships between the theories we’re reading and the performance texts—to conduct a waltz, if you will, between theory and practice. We will also do in-class writing exercises, improve performances, and work in small groups. At times, we will make use of the stage and use performance as a method of critical inquiry. You will be graded on your engagement and preparation, not on your skill as a performer.

If you must miss class, you are still responsible for acquiring and reading the readings! EMAIL THE PROFESSOR AND/OR COME TO OFFICE HOURS!!!

Play Attendance
You will be required to attend three performances this semester. We will go to
**Angels in America on Sunday, September 18, off-campus at Roundhouse Theater in Silver Spring; Naomi Iizuka’s Anon(ymous) on campus on October 6; attend (A Go-GO Musical), directed by Natsu Onoda Power on campus November 10. Admission will be free for class members if you go with the group!!! These are required, so if you don’t go with the group, you’ll have to go on**
your own. Keep your ticket stub as evidence of attendance. There will be a multitude of assignments related to these plays—they are core ‘texts’ for our course. We will also have a few dining events prior to the performances, in which eating delicious food, intelligent discussion, and communitas will be required.

**Final Project**
There are three avenues for your final project, which you will develop in close consultation with me. All will require extensive research, writing, and revision. Performance is here understood to be a form of research.

**OPTION ONE: REWRITING THE PLAY**

Choose one of the plays we've studied this semester, and radically rewrite it to reflect your critique of the original text. You must compose one complete scene and perform it, using actors from the class or from the greater Georgetown community. Think about form as well as content, direction as well as acting. You must submit a complete draft of the text early on in the process, and expect to write multiple drafts. This should be 3-5 original pages. You will also write 3-5 page explaining why you chose the play you chose to rewrite; what critical intervention you want to make in it; how you went about the process of researching, writing, casting, and staging the performance; what you see now that you didn’t see at the outset. Include a bibliography of 5-8 new sources that helped you in your creation of this piece.

**OPTION TWO: REWRITING THE COURSE**

You are the professor! You will design one unit of our course—the missing link, the subject that you wish we'd covered, or covered dramatically differently. You will select three plays and three theoretical works as part of this new unit, and will explicate in 5-10 pages the following: why you are choosing these, what your learning goals are, what performative and scholarly assignments you will ask the class to do, and how you will implement all this. You will present a class based on this work. Include a bibliography of 5-8 new sources that helped you design this unit.

**OPTION THREE: REWRITING THE DISCOURSE**

What is missing in our critical conversation? You will find 3-5 sources not used in our class to analyze one of the assigned plays. Your sources should be advanced scholarly sources from any field(s). Your 5-10 page paper will demonstrate what these critiques offer that our course’s discourse did not. At least one section of your project should involve close textual/performance analysis of the play using these new sources. Beware the limits of negative critique! This paper should also include an assignment that you design using these sources and the original play text. You will present your argument, sources, and assignment to the class. Include a bibliography of 5-8 new sources that helped you construct your discourse.
Due **Monday, December 12** (30% of final grade – no late papers will be accepted.). You will receive prodigious guidelines for this project.

**Quick Remix of Assignments:**
Weekly play reading & précis writing collected in reading journal
Three performances to attend
One final seminar paper (draft gets a grade as well as the final version).

**Breakdown of Grades:**
Class participation (liveliness and depth of preparation & engagement in discussions, performances and presentations): 30%
Final Project (paper + presentation):
  Draft 1: 10%
  Final Draft: 30%
Reading Journal: 30%

**Description of grading criteria:**
A  "A" papers exhibit a complex argument and insightful analysis that moves well beyond the points covered in class discussion. By closely reading a theatrical and critical text as well as connecting that analysis to larger contexts, "A" essays will offer the reader new ways of thinking about the texts in question. "A" essays also demonstrate excellent organization, development, transitions, grammar, and style of prose.

B  "B" essays exhibit a mastery over the issues and work discussed by closely reading the texts and connecting them to the larger contexts that we have discussed in class. The argument is a sound one; the evidence is clearly organized and presented. "B" papers offer concise and pertinent points, smooth transitions, good grammar, and clear prose.

C  "C" essays offer an adequate argument, coherently presented evidence, and clear engagement with the topic. "C" papers might contain limitations in one of the following areas: argument, organization, analysis, grammar, or style. For example, the central argument might be too general, the analysis predictable, the organization lopsided, or the grammar and syntax error-ridden.

D  "D" papers demonstrate a serious weakness in one of the following areas: argument, organization, analysis, grammar, or style. "D" essays might contain an argument that is more of an observation than an argument, organization that is unclear, evidence that is poorly presented, or consistent and numerous errors in grammar or spelling.

**Unacceptable Essays (F!)**
The unacceptable essay contains one or more of the following:
- no recognizable argument
- no concrete evidence to back up an argument
- no determinable plan of development or organization
- incoherent, vague, or unclear support
- frequent errors in grammar and word choice

**Plagiarism will not be tolerated.** If you use somebody else’s ideas, you must acknowledge and cite them. I will check every paper thoroughly for plagiarism. If you’re unclear what constitutes plagiarism, please consult [http://www.georgetown.edu/departments/english/undergraduate/documentation/pla.htm](http://www.georgetown.edu/departments/english/undergraduate/documentation/pla.htm)

**Accommodations**
I am committed to providing whatever it takes to help you be successful in this course. Please let me know what you need to access materials and complete assignments. Also, if you have a documented disability, please communicate your need for accommodations to the Academic Resource Center. Go to [http://guarc.georgetown.edu/disability/accommodations](http://guarc.georgetown.edu/disability/accommodations) for further information. For specific help with writing, students should make use of the Writing Center: [http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/](http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/)

**Communication**
Please come to my office hours if you have a problem, question, comment, or just want to extend our classroom discussion. You may also email me anytime if you have questions about an assignment, presentation, reading, etc. Don’t hesitate to be frank with me. If you treat me honestly and respectfully, I promise you the same.

**Office Hours: W 1-2 Room 338 New North or by appointment**—please come early and often! It’s fine to come just to chat, or to go over an assignment, or for any other reason whatsoever!

**Attendance**
I take attendance in every class, and attendance will be a key factor in my evaluation of your work. Absences beyond three will result in reduction of your grade by one mark for every day over there: an A thus becomes an A- on the 3rd missed class. **If you miss a class, you are still responsible for reading or viewing all materials and handing in your assignment on time. You must mail me if you miss a class.**

Note to the wise: READ EVERYTHING ASSIGNED. EVERYTHING. I have actually read everything I assign, so it is evident to me when you have not.

**Course Outline**
NOTE: This includes only the plays and performance texts. **Additional required theoretical texts will be distributed in class on Mondays.**

Note to the creative: This is an outline. Its relation to the actual course is that of a blueprint to a building. We will reimagine, revise, rethink our class as we create it. Be playful, flexible, and prepared, and you will do just fine!
August 31: Introduction
Name Game

September 7: Identity/Identifying/Performance
What is identity? Who decides? What is performance’s relationship to the notion of self? Who decides? (in-class performance workshop)
Review syllabus; you will be signing up for presentations!
60-Second Self Live!

UNIT I: Who Am I? (Performing the Self)
September 12-14: Angels in America

September 18: Attend Angels in America off-campus!

September 19-21: Twilight, Los Angeles

September 26-September 28: Songs of the Dragon Flying to Heaven

UNIT II: Who Was I? (Performing [Personal] History)
October 3-5: Anon{ymous}: An Adaptation of the Odyssey –guest speakers!
Professor-led

October 6: attend Anon{ymous}: An Adaptation of the Odyssey

October 10: No Class

October 12: Performance Surprise!

October 17-19: Fun Home

UNIT III: Who Are You? (Performing the Other)
October 24-26 The Mother*ucker in the Hat

October 31- Nov 2 Good People

UNIT IV: Who do I want to be? (Performing Possibility)
Nov 7-9 Tribes

Nov 10 Attend (A Go-Go Musical): On-Campus Performance Project

Nov 14-16 Hedwig and the Angry Inch

Nov 21 Special Performance Event/Guest Speaker

NO CLASS NOVEMBER 23—HAPPY T-DAY
Nov. 28-30 Paper Proposal Workshop
Dec 5: Revision Workshop

Dec 7: Final Paper Presentations

Final Papers Due December 12
No lates, no extensions!

Doyle Seminar
This course is a Doyle Seminar, part of the Doyle Engaging Difference Program, a new campus-wide curricular initiative, and gives faculty the opportunity to enhance the student research component of upper-level seminars that address questions of national, social, cultural, religious, moral, and other forms of difference. The Doyle seminars are intended to deepen student learning about diversity and difference through enhanced research opportunities, interaction with thought leaders, and dialogue with the Georgetown community and beyond. To that end, we’ll be attending plays, engaging outside experts, and otherwise extending our classroom work together.

Required Texts
All required texts except the Iizuka are available at the Georgetown University Barnes and Noble Bookstore. Please make sure to purchase the CORRECT editions!

Iizuka, Naomi. Anon(ymous): An Adaptation of The Odyssey. (handout from Professor Fink).

Welcome aboard!!!!!!