

SURFACE, SURFACE, SURFACE...

POSTMODERNISM AND AMERICAN PERFORMANCE CULTURE

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt

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Room and Time: SR 34 D2 · Friday, 16:30-18:00

Course number: SE 512.312

Description: Since the early 1990s, the concept of 'performance' has become a chief concern in American cultural studies.

Like no other term, 'performance' stands for the instability of social, cultural, and individual identity. If previous approaches insisted on the stability of truth and reason as universal ideals, performance theory tends to cultivate a belief in the unreliability and inconsistency of cultural practice. Today, reality seems to be a colorful patchwork whose materiality has to be constituted anew time and time again. In postmodernity, the self seems to be deprived of any 'essence,' functioning more and more as a 'performative' entity expressing itself *through* the body but lacking a stable core. Among a wide range of artists, we will look at Madonna and Lady Gaga and their usage of 'performance' as a means of their visual art. Attention will also be paid to the Hollywood star cult (Marilyn Monroe and James Dean) and the attempts to create performative texts in film, literature, and television.

Methods: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by 'experts' who organize the session by means of questions, games, illustrations, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short info block (or, alternatively, a fact file on a handout).

Aims: The seminar will deal with the interdependences between individual 'performances' and the media in which they are located. Feature films, sitcoms and video clips will be analyzed along with documentaries, photography, and performance art.

Assessment: Regular **attendance**; active in-class **participation**; presentation as part of an **expert session** with 3-page handout and three online questions; at least **9 entries in the discussion forum**; **research proposal** of 2 and **final paper** of 10-12 pages.

Grading: 1/3 – Attendance, participation, and discussion entries; 1/3 – expert session; 1/3 – research proposal and final paper. Please note that you need a "4" ("Genügend") in each category in order to pass the course.

Materials: A course reader containing all mandatory texts is available at our office (Attemsgasse 25, 2nd floor, opening hours Mon-Fri 9-12). All texts (plus a number of additional texts) are also available on the Moodle course site.

Uploads: All experts will make sure that their three online questions are available 9 days *before* the session. PowerPoint presentations and handouts *must* be made available within 1 week *after* the session. Please send all documents to our student assistant Sue Lim at marilyn.lim@edu.uni-graz.at.

Syllabus

March 14 Introduction – Performativity and Performance Culture

Basic texts (strongly recommended):

Marvin Carlson, "What Is Performance?" (1996), 1-7.

Richard Schechner, "What Is Performance?" (2002), 22-44.

March 21 Music I – "Strike a Pose!" Madonna's Multiple Personalities

Main example (required):

Madonna, "Express Yourself" (1989) & "Vogue" (1990). Watch online!

Additional text (optional):

Robert Miklitsch, "The Case of 'Madonna Studies.'" *From Hegel to Madonna* (1998), 99-140.

March 28 Photography – Art and the Performativity of the Image

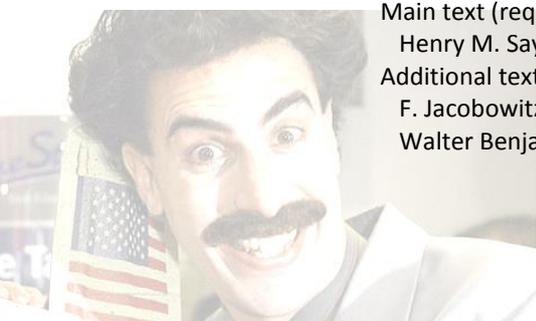
Main text (required):

Henry M. Sayre, "The Rhetoric of the Pose: Photography and the Portrait as Performance" (1989), 35-65.

Additional texts (optional):

F. Jacobowitz and R. Lippe, "Performance and the Still Photograph: Marilyn Monroe" (1997), 12-19.

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (2005 [1936]).



- April 4** **Film I – Performance and Gender**
Main example:
 Morocco (1930, dir. Josef v. Sternberg). Watch clips on YouTube!
Main text (strongly recommended):
 Judith Butler, “Bodily Incriptions, Performative Subversions.” *Gender Trouble* (1990), 128-141.
- April 11** **Poetry – Jazz, the Beats, and the Culture of Spontaneity**
Main example (required):
 Allen Ginsberg, “Howl” (1955/56) & “Footnote to Howl” (1955).
Additional texts (optional):
 Howl (2010, dir. Rob Epstein) & D. Gertmenian, “Remembering and Rereading ‘Howl’” (1975), 151-63.
- May 9** **Film II – Affective Memory and Spontaneous Acting + Extra-screening (date will be announced)**
Main example (required):
 East of Eden (1954, dir. Elia Kazan).
Additional texts (optional):
 Johanne Larue & Carole Zucker, “James Dean: The Pose of Reality?” (1990), 295-324.
 Constantin Stanislavski, “When Acting Is an Art” (1991 [1936]), 18-33.
- May 16** **Feminist Performance Art – Staging Images / Performing Identity**
Main texts (required):
 Anna Deavere Smith, *Fires in the Mirror* (1992) & Annie Sprinkle, “Anatomy of a Pin-Up Photo” (1991).
Additional text (optional):
 Linda Williams, “The Pornography and Performance Art of Annie Sprinkle” (1993), 117-133.
- May 23** **Television I – Stand-Up Comedy and the Sitcom**
Main example (required):
 Will & Grace, “Mega-News (The Buying Game)” (1999). Check out episode in Media Archive.
Additional text (optional):
 Christopher Castiglia, “Memory and Queer Culture in *Will and Grace*” (2004), 158-188.
- June 6** **Music II – HipHop and Fake Authenticity + Extra-screening (date will be announced)**
Main example (required):
 8 Mile (2002, dir. Curtis Hanson).
Additional texts (optional):
 K. Lee, “Eminem’s Autobiographical Postures and the Construction of Identity Authenticity” (2008), 351-73.
- June 13** **Television II – The Talk Show as Trash Opera**
Main example (required):
 The Jerry Springer Show (NBC, 1991 – today). Watch clips on YouTube!
 Debbie Epstein, “Life in the Beep-Cycle: Inventing Id-TV on the Jerry Springer Show” (2003), 90-114.
Additional text (optional):
 Wayne Munson, “The Sense of the Talkshow” (1993), 1-18.
- June 20** **Literature – Empty Personalities and Consumerism**
Main text (required):
 Bret Easton Ellis, selected excerpts from *American Psycho* (1991).
Additional text (optional):
 Carla Freccero, “The Case of *American Psycho*” (1997), 44-58.
- June 27** **Film III – Enter the Schlemiel: Irony and Performance + Extra-screening (date will be announced)**
Main example (required):
 Borat (2006, dir. Larry Charles).
Additional text (optional):
 David Buchbinder, “Enter the Schlemiel: The Emergence of Inadequate or Incompetent Masculinity in Recent Film and Television” (2008), 227-245.
- July 4** **Music III – Performance Identity and the End of Authenticity**
Main texts (required):
 Lady Gaga, “Telephone” (2009) & “Born This Way” (2011). Please watch online.
 Derritt Mason, “Rah, Rah, Ah-Ah-Ah: Lady Gaga, Hysteria, Commodity Fetishism” (2010).

– Deadline for the final paper –