How do words mobilize political action? How do acts of performance and display manage to be both theatrical and serious, and to what effect? What does performance say about performers’ creativity? The anthropological study of performance and politics views creative activity as an important source of social and personal transformation, and in so doing highlights the importance of innovative action in political life. In addition to reading texts by Judith Butler, Pierre Bourdieu, Clifford Geertz, and Victor Turner, attention will be given to the insights of linguistic anthropology into the expressive contexts of political discourse. Discussions will center on symbolic and ritual practice, oratory, humor, poetic tropes, affect, and mass media. Evaluation will be based on class presentations and a term paper.

This ambivalent structure at the heart of performativity implies that, within political discourse, the very terms of resistance and insurgency are spawned in part by the powers they oppose.


Never is domination more perfect than when the dominated people think like the dominators do.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, at the opening of the 12th annual G-15 Summit (2004)

There is no strong performance without a little fanaticism in the performer.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1887)

“This is not a video game… this is a serious game.”

Defense Department spokesmen on NPR after the launch of the Gulf War, 1991.
Expectations and Requirements
Performance and Politics

Grades will be based on:
- Class Participation: 10%
- Weekly E-mail observations: So that all participants in the course play an active role in setting our agenda for discussion, you will be asked to e-mail observations about the readings to the whole class (see handout): 30%
- Paper project, including: (see handout)
  - Bibliography (of 15-25 texts) and prospectus (2-3 pages): 10% each
  - Class oral presentation: 10%
  - Paper: 30%

**Attendance**: Mandatory, as is your timely arrival to class and thoughtful class preparation. Students with two or more unexcused absences will fail the course. In the event of an absence, it is your responsibility to find out from a classmate what we have covered and to pick up/turn in assignments and papers.

**Class Participation**: This class involves some lecture and much discussion. Because discussion only works when everyone is alert, involved, and conscientious about participation, class participation significantly affects your grade. Good class participation not only means speaking up in class, it means demonstrating that you are listening well to your peers and the instructor.

**Late Papers**: Late papers inconvenience all of us. So to receive full credit for your work, it must be turned in at the appointed time. Late papers (whatever the reason for them) will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late (e.g., a B paper would become a B-). Papers turned in within 2 hours of the deadline time will be lowered 1/3 of a letter grade; after that time, the paper will be considered a day late.
Schedule and Readings
Performance and Politics

Required textbooks:

Week One, 1/8: introduction
(For fun: Berger, L.R. “The President and the Poet Come to the Negotiating Table,” in *Shock and Awe: War on Words*, Eds. B. Eekelen, J. González, B. Stötzer, A. Tsing. (pp.2-3.))

Optional Readings:

Week Two, 1/15: performative discourse
S. Tambiah, “The Magical Power of Words,” in *Culture, Thought, and Social Action* (1985). (pp.17-40 only (the rest of the article is optional))
(For fun, with this piece: Freccero, Carla. “Nomads” in *Shock and Awe: War on Words*, Eds. B. Eekelen, J. González, B. Stötzer, A. Tsing. (pp.104-107.))

Optional Readings:
J. Austin, Lectures 1,2,8,9 in *How to Do Things with Words*. (pp.1-24,94-119)
Chapters 1 & 2 (pp.16-65) in B. Lee’s *Talking Heads: Language, Metalanguage, and the Semiotics of Subjectivity* (on Austin, Frege, Searle, and Derrida)

Week Three, 1/22: symbolic forms
Part I: Rituals and Roles


Part II: Frames and Texts

G. Bateson, “A Theory of Fantasy and Play” (1972) in Steps to an Ecology of Mind (pp.177-93)

E. Goffman, “Keys and Keying” (1974) in Frame Analysis (pp.40-82)

C. Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” in The Interpretation of Cultures (1973), (pp.412-53)

(Optional: C. Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” in The Interpretation of Cultures (1973), (pp.87-125).)

Optional Readings:


Week Four, 1/29: framing race

A. Lemon, Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Postsocialism. (2000)

Week Five, 2/5: the structuring of responsibility

Part I:


Part II:

J. Hill, “The Voices of Don Gabriel: Responsibility and Self in a Modern Mexicano Narrative,” (1995) in The Dialogic Emergence of Culture (pp.97-147)


Bibliography due in class

Optional Readings:


J. Gumperz “Contextualization and Understanding,” (1997), ibid. (pp.229-52)


Week Six, 2/12: authority and poetic tropes

Part I:
M. Bloch, "Introduction" (1975) in Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society (pp.1-28)

E. Keenan, "A Sliding Sense of Obligatoriness: The Polystructure of Malagasy Oratory" (1975) in Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society (pp.93-112)

Part II:

P. Friedrich, "Polytropy" (1991) in Beyond Metaphor: The Theory of Tropes in Anthropology (pp.17-55)


Prospectus due in class

Optional readings:


Week Seven, 2/19: linguistic markets and the politics of affect

Part I:


C. LaDousa, "Disparate Markets: Language, Nation, and Education in North India," (2005) American Ethnologist, v.32(3) (pp.460-78)


Part II:


Optional Readings:


N. Besnier, "Language and Affect," (1990) Annual Reviews of Anthropology v.19 (pp.419-51)


R. Williams, "Structures of Feeling," (1977) in Marxism and Literature. (pp.128-35)


Week Eight, 2/26: critical voices in the “war on terror”: the case of the Guantánamo poets

Additional readings on the book and its reception:

- **On political discourse about Guantánamo, Torture, and the “War on Terror”**
  - Cheney, R. (Extract from a speech in February, 2008 at the Pennsylvania State Victory Committee, in Harrisburg, PA.) *(optional)*

- **Reviews of the book (in chronological order)**

- **On poetry and poetics**
    ---------, Excerpts from *Poetry and Commitment*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company. (pp.21-39) *(handout)*

*Oral presentations in class*

**Week Nine, 3/4: trangressive humor and its capitulations**

Part I:

Part II:


Optional Readings:


Week Ten, 3/11: the rhetorics of spectacle


Paper and Abstract due on Saturday, March 22 at 3 pm