

WST 610-S02

Performance Studies: Theories, Methods, Activism

Fall 2020

Wednesdays, 4-6:50 pm

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What “is” performance, this contested term? What does it “do”? How does what performance “is” and what it “does” change when we interrogate the circumstances under which it “is” and “does”? When we investigate the when, how, and for whom it “is” and “does”? How is understanding performance as an object, a lens, a modality, and a method useful in interdisciplinary studies? And how is performance linked to activism?

These are some of the questions we will grapple with in this graduate course.

While mapping the history of the field of performance studies, this course will approach performance from multiple angles. We will analyze performance as a means of creative expression. We will examine it as a mode of critical inquiry. We will discuss its potential as a tactic for public engagement and activism. As we do so, we will attend to both the practice of performance (ex: gestures, behavior, and artistic enactment) and the study of performance (ex: reproduction, observation, and analysis).

Beyond analyzing and critiquing select foundational texts, this course will take care to emphasize the relationship between theory and practice through experiential activities.



Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco in a staged portrait for
The Year of the White Bear exhibition, 1992.

The exhibit included the performance *The Couple in a Cage:
Two Amerindians Visit the West*.

Photo courtesy the Walker Art Center Archives.