“Performance Studies” gained academic prominence in departments of theater in the 1980s, then became increasingly influential in other fields. Richard Schechner, one of the founding figures of performances studies in the US, says on p. 1 of his introductory book, “anything and everything can be studied ‘as’ performance.” This course starts with the premise that it is fruitful and important to study religion as performance. The definition of performance studies is contested, but to say it puts a focus on embodiment/action is uncontroversial. We’ll have ten once-a-week meetings plus a meeting for presentations during finals week. Schechner’s book will be used as a basic text, along with other readings from the fields of religion and performance. Some of the examples we take up will focus on “ritual,” some on more “aesthetic” performative manifestations of religion (especially music, implying such forms as drama and dance), but it will quickly become apparent that these categories interpenetrate. Besides reading, assignments will include attending and observing religious rituals and other performative activities. Three interesting opportunities in spring: the Passover seder, Apr 8-9; the annual Powwow at Stanford, May 8-10; the Kabir Festival, organized by the course instructor, bringing singers of the works of Kabir, a great Indian religious poet. The singers will come to class May 6 and have a public performance May 8.

We will proceed by bringing together a series of concepts/methods/tools from performance studies and a series of examples/approaches from the field of religion. We will have guest speakers, artists, films, and student presentations.
Required Books

Course Reader to be distributed in class.

Schedule

APRIL

1  Intro to the course. Discussion: What is ritual? What to observe when we observe ritual? What questions do we ask? What kinds of knowledge are available? Examples from our own experience and from video in class.

8  Read RS ch 2-3, “What is Performance?”, 28-51; “Ritual,” 52-88; Read Catherine Bell, chap. 4, pp 93-137, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* Read Exodus 1-16. Look over selections from two Haggadahs in folder, RS lounge (don’t have to read thoroughly).

Recommended: Attend a seder after class today, or tomorrow. Come back with observations, experiences, analysis based on tools we now have.

15  Ritual chanting / music
Guest speaker: Prof. William Mahrt of the Stanford Music Dept.

Read the short article. (If interested: click “Hear the discussion” (20 min.), which includes debate on music in Catholic church. You can also listen to samples of Gregorian chant, clickable on the left under “Golden Oldies.”)


+++  APRIL 20: RECOMMENDED FILM SCREENING. “In the Market Stands Kabir”: Journeys with Sacred and Secular Kabir. 7 p.m., 200-203.

+++  22  Sacrifice; ritual & violence.
Guest speaker: David Carrasco, Neil L. Rudinstein Professor of the Study of Latin America, Harvard University.
About Prof. Carrasco: [http://www.hds.harvard.edu/faculty/carrasco.cfm](http://www.hds.harvard.edu/faculty/carrasco.cfm)
Read: Rig Veda, poem on horse sacrifice.
Read: Schechner, ch. 4, “Play,” 89-122.
Consider: religious uses of animal sacrifice (e.g., Vedic, Eid al-Adha, goats & buffaloes for Hindu goddesses, temple Judaism, Abraham and Isaac, the lamb of Passover, Jesus as sacrificial lamb. War and genocide as ritual slaughter. Riefenstahl’s filmic record of Nazi myth and ritual. “Dark play” in Schechner.

Can you imagine yourself killing a living creature as a “religious” or “sacred” act?

29 Review of what we’ve done so far.
Here we will catch up, reviewing important ideas in performance theory, discussing examples, observations and experiences, and having a presentation by Trent on the Cambodian Buddhist chanting he has studied.


MAY

6 Music and poetry: the example of Kabir, a mystical/religious poet of India
Singers in class. Read Kabir selections. Attend concert Fri May 8, 7:30 pm.

Anticipating the next meeting: Recommend attending church or other organized weekly ritual. Look for formal-spontaneous spectrum, among other things we’re being trained to look for. Consider going to one of the more participatory, enthusiastic types of Christian service, especially if you have experienced a very formal type, as some of us did during Easter week.

13 Protestant encounters with the Holy Spirit—Evangelical/Charismatic/Pentecostal
Note: besides reading Acts 2, you can click “Listen to the chapter.” I recommend this.
Read: Introduction to Anne Taves, Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James, pp. 3-12.

Consider: What factors gave rise in various periods and circumstances to emphasis on the Pentecost story and on intense, publicly enacted, individual experience of the Holy Spirit?


27 Integration: religion, performance, and performance studies as we see them now

Presentation by Prof. Kris Salata and Michelle Sutherland: Grotowski on theatre and ritual

JUNE
3 – Conclusion

Mon. June 8, 12-3 (our scheduled final exam time): student presentations
Course Requirements

• Attendance and participation: very important
• Apr 8, 15, 22. Report orally and write up notes on an experience/observation of performance during the previous week. Would you call it “religious”? Why or why not? We’ll discuss these in class and post the notes on Coursework.
• Term project in stages
  1. Apr. 17. Submit 1-3 potential topics.
  2. Apr. 24. Submit a statement, one paragraph to one page, on the topic you have chosen and what you hope to do with it. Include basic questions you’re asking, methods, possible argument(s) (which of course can change as your project continues). We’ll discuss these in class.
  3. May 15: progress report, 3-5 pages of writing plus annotated list of at least five sources (can be written texts, other kinds of texts, or field activities). Will be graded.
  5. Finals week: presentations

Grading

Attendance & participation: 20%
3 sets of notes on performance: 15%. (Ungraded. Do them all on time = A. Late or missing = lower than A)
Progress report: 20%
Final paper: 45%