

“Performance Studies” is a new and broadly-defined field. To teach it successfully requires a rigorous philosophy: a precise definition of *performance*, a practical approach to analysis, a clear vision of learning goals, and a sincere appreciation of the benefits which accrue from its exploration. The curricula of Performance Studies may differ widely depending upon the enculturation and expertise of its students and instructors; in each case, the wide range of its scope must be brought into focus. A philosophy of Performance Studies enables a student to discover the discipline and be inspired to learn.

I define *performance* as any communication between human bodies. I readily confess that this definition is staggeringly inclusive. Every human endeavor involving two or more people—from a desultory hallway hello to the fashioning of a space shuttle—may be analyzed as a performance. Performance Studies is sometimes disparaged by those who fail to see the commonality between, say, ordering a ham sandwich and publishing a geological survey, but the connection is there in the essential basis of human communication. The applicability of performance studies is, and should be, universal. When a human being performs some action, and the results of that action are transmitted to another human being, a “performance” has occurred. Human experience extends beyond the performing “arts.” All human beings are *actors* because all humans *act*.

Studying performance means analyzing communication at four stages: formation, expression, transmission, and reception. This series represents the complete life cycle of an action, from concept to consequence. Each phase of the cycle demands a series of questions. What circumstances gave rise to the action? Why did it manifest in a particular form? Was its transmission displaced, distorted, or destroyed? How did it influence its audience? These questions, of course, can be considered from multiple perspectives. Performance Studies is distinguished by its focus on action. Performance Studies enumerates the actions taken to craft and transmit a communication, and it identifies the behavior of whatever audience receives that communication. Analysis then proceeds to connect specific behaviors with the human conditions they represent. By this process, Performance Studies examines *how* to discover *why*.

The ideal learning goal of Performance Studies is visceral. The process of analysis explores the reciprocal relationship of context and action, using each to explain the other. The purpose of analysis is, therefore, to describe a performance as representative of its culture. Such a description is inherently valuable to people who are already part of that culture; they gain an elevated understanding of their everyday experience. For cross-cultural or historical study, however, there is a further step to be taken. Performance Studies analysis helps us understand a *form of communication*—a template from which a performance may be crafted. By creating a performance faithful to the conditions of that template, a student discovers their thoughts and values shaped into new and unexpected forms. They reach out to their audience in an unfamiliar manner and, through that effort, learn new ways to share themselves with others. Both actor and audience thereby learn that the performance being studied is not an exotic ritual meaningful only to the foreigners who enact it. They feel the human connection it provides.

This approach to Performance Studies invites students to rediscover themselves. From every topic studied, they learn new aspects of self, new ways of relating to others, and new perspectives on old assumptions. Students need not mount the stage to benefit from the work. When every human connection is understood as a performance, a student of Performance Studies enjoys a stronger connection to the human race. As each student learns more about themselves, they become eager to learn more about Performance Studies.

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