

Performing Religion

REL 300 | Spring 2017

Who is teaching our course?

Kathleen Baum

Office hours: Friday 4:00–6:00 and by appointment, across from Syracuse Stage

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What is our course about?

Religion is a performance. This argument is at our course's heart. What might this argument mean? What differences might this argument make for our understandings of religion and performance? In our course, we will explore these and related questions as ways of investigating and evaluating this argument. We will do so in the richest ways possible, across disciplines and through a variety of texts and activities. Our course combines interdisciplinary readings of plays and theoretical texts with performance work and written assignments to examine the scopes and stakes of this argument. This combination engenders critical work from multiple perspectives.

This critical work includes performance work. Our course uses performance as a tool to enhance critical reading, thinking, writing, and speaking skills and to augment and deepen different kinds of learning. In our course, performance works as a means to an end: as a way of comprehending and assessing our course's argument and its consequences. To this end, you will create, present, discuss, and write about your own, original enactments of our course's argument. To prepare you for this work, and to support and enrich your experiences, we will explore aspects of time, space, and embodiment as malleable, expressive variables. We will do so using exercises based on the work of Viola Spolin, Anne Bogart, Nikolai Karpov, and Michael Chekhov.

So performance works with other modes of humanistic inquiry to magnify and improve our analyses of religion, performance, their intersections, and those intersections' effects. This integration of perspectives and methods enables us to consider in new ways how religion and performance work, what religion and performance do, and why religion and performance matter in human lives.

What do we hope to gain from our course?

Our course's readings, discussions, performances, and other elements work together in the service of our course's learning goals:

- (1) to articulate how religion works, what religion does, and why religion matters in different individual and collective, past and present contexts;
- (2) to analyze religious expressions and interpretations of them using a variety of approaches and methods;
- (3) to use performance as one of these approaches and methods: as an insightful analytic tool for thinking through conceptual questions about religion's contexts, operations, effects, and significances;
- (4) to demonstrate how religion and performance inform and reform our senses of them, individually and relationally;
- (5) to draw on course materials and activities to evaluate—and support or challenge—"religion is a performance" as an argument about religion, performance, their relations, and their meaningful effects;
- (6) to develop and practice critical and self-critical habits of reading, thinking, writing, speaking, and acting as modes of humanistic inquiry.

What will we read?

Sophokles, *Antigone* (9781783198108)

Bess Wohl, *Small Mouth Sounds* (9780822234012)

Additional texts will be available via Blackboard. You must bring to class paper copies of the texts we are discussing that day.