THE PERFORMANCE OF POWER: ORATORY AND AUTHORITY FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD TO THE POSTMODERN

ORAL COMMUNICATION 177

Summer Session, 2024
Monday Wednesday 4:30-6:30 PM
Wallenberg 129
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I will, sir, flatter my sworn brother the people, to earn a dearer estimation of them; 'tis a condition they account gentle; and since the wisdom of their choice is rather to have my hat than my heart, I will practice the insinuating nod, and be off to them most counterfeitly; that is, sir, I will counterfeit the bewitchment of some popular man, and give it bountiful to the desirers. Therefore, beseech you, I may be consul.

William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* II iii

Speech as action has long been seen as essential to leadership. This course examines theories and examples of oratory, from Pericles to Barack Obama, and now to Donald Trump and Joe Biden, assessing each as a model of voice-activated authority. The class also surveys the impact of mass-media technologies as they continue to transform the public space of oratory.

Recent world events have intensified public focus on the use and effects of political oratory and political communications in general, and this course accordingly will make use of the most current available texts and recordings. For this reason the selection and scheduling of readings on this syllabus will be subject to change.

Learning objectives:
Students will study a range of performances of power, centering chiefly on but not limited to oratory. Students will learn techniques of close textual reading, combining this with awareness of historical contexts to develop an enriched sense of the ways in which what might be termed *displays* of power are in fact *instances* of power's exercise. By writing and delivering oratorical performances of their own students will gain an experiential appreciation of what makes oratory work. Class discussions will bring textual and historical study, along with performative explorations, into a contemporary

media environment, investigating the reciprocal effects of form and content in the context of power and public utterance. The final term paper will allow students to reflect on and develop their own individual views of issues raised in the course, articulating them by means of an enhanced toolkit of critical terms and concepts.

Course requirements:

Course Readings:

Links are provided for online access to readings; other course readings can be found on the course Canvas website.

The readings are intended to serve as case studies in the Performance of Power. As we read and discuss each of them, imagine for the moment that this person/event/movement was *your* research topic. How would you frame your research question[s]? What research strategy would you employ to investigate this person or phenomenon?

Attendance.

As we (hopefully) put COVID-19 behind us, regular in-person attendance in class will be the presumed norm. Allowance will be made, however, for difficulties that arise due to students' health situation, and of course as future events may warrant change. **Do not attend class if you are not feeling well.** Contact the instructor if you will miss class, and together we will work out a way to make up missed work. **More than two absences will start to endanger your grade in the class. Four or more absences (per PWR policy) means YOU WILL NOT PASS THE CLASS.**

Class Participation:

In our class meetings we will be discussing the readings, but I will also **require** that each student contribute some written comments to the discussion on Canvas. These contributions will supplement the activities that take place in class-time. They can absolutely be *questions* that you want to throw out for further discussion. Comments may be longer or shorter; I'm much more interested in *substance* than word count.

Each Canvas discussion contribution MUST be made in the same week as the reading assignment it responds to.

There will also be in-class scaffolding assignments; time will be allocated for their completion within class-time.

Deliver a brief oration (3-5 minutes) in the form of a eulogy (a form that we will be studying in class), and one longer presentation (7-10 minutes) on your research paper, for a total of two individual presentations per student in the course of the class. The idea with the prepared performances is to explore the *formal* characteristics of the speeches we study by applying them to contemporary subject matter, as well as to present (in the final talk) a précis of research findings in a scholarly setting. All Eulogy presentations will be performed live in class, and video-recorded. These videos will be uploaded to a Google-drive folder set up for the class (watching yourself give a talk is a

very efficient way to get better at public speaking). **A written text (or notes) of each presentation must be submitted when the talk is delivered. Rubrics for these presentations can be found in the section of 'Assignments' on the Canvas page for this class.**

Group projects:

Students will form groups of four or five and carry out the following assignment: each group will be the communications/strategy team for some kind of powerful figure (a political leader, a business executive, a religious or NGO leader—groups are free to negotiate with the instructor the sort of leader they want to work for). Each group will then devise a performance of power for that leader to carry out. This can be a speech (the group would have to draft the speech); it can be a multi-media communication strategy, a Twitter campaign, a web-based outreach effort; it can be a one-off live event. Let your imaginations roam. The group will research possible historical precedents for their proposal (however original an idea the group comes up with, something *like* it will probably have been tried), and then the group will develop and deliver a pitch for their proposal. These pitch presentations (10-15 minutes in length) will be delivered to the entire class in week 7.

Term paper:

Write an 8-10 page analysis of a historical oration or other performance of power, a final version of which will be handed in at the end of the quarter. This paper can address any of the speaker/writers studied in class, or can focus on a speaker or performer selected in consultation with the instructor. This paper will examine both the modes of argumentation employed by the speaker *and* the performative qualities of the text (as determined by research into the speaking conditions and expectations of the day, as well as by "dramaturgical" assessment of the text itself). And note that "text" can be defined *very* broadly. A research topic does not necessarily have to be an example of oratory; many types of performance can be considered. **The final draft of the final paper will be due NO LATER than 11:59 PM on Thursday, August 15th (the end of the final week of classes; the last day of Summer Session).**

Please note: we can adopt a very broad concept of a "Performance of Power" for the paper. We will discuss these concepts in depth on the first day of class, and return to them obsessively throughout the quarter. Let your imagination roam— people have written excellent papers about speeches (by both political officeholders and participants in social movements), about Super Bowl halftime shows (Beyoncé), about fashion, about international naval maneuvers in the western Pacific, about various styles of political satire. Let me know what ideas you're considering and I would be happy to help you focus on one or refine it into something manageable for a paper.

→ **A prospectus outlining your topic and your research strategy is due on the Wednesday of week 2 (July 3rd);**

→ **A draft of the paper is due on the Wednesday of week 4 (July 17th);**

→ **THE FINAL DRAFT OF THE PAPER IS DUE NO LATER THAN Thursday, August 15th AT 11:59 PM. THERE CAN BE NO EXTENSIONS BEYOND THIS DATE. Rubrics for both the prospectus and the final paper can be found in the section of 'Assignments' on the Canvas page.**

Feedback and Revision:
— **For each of the individual presentations, students are encouraged to submit draft versions of their speech texts to the instructor before submitting a final version;**
— **each student's research strategy for the final paper must be discussed with the instructor during the second week of the quarter (this discussion can be either in person or over Zoom, as the student prefers);**
— **a first draft of the research paper must be handed in to the instructor by the fourth week of the quarter, so that time remains for feedback to be incorporated in a revision process. Another individual check-in on research and writing progress with the instructor will take place in week 5.**

AI Policy

Generative AI (e.g., ChatGTP, etc.) offers interesting possibilities for developing writing and speaking projects. It is *not*, however, any adequate substitute for your own efforts. The University Honor Code is quite specific on this topic: (https://communitystandards.stanford.edu/policies-guidance/honor-code) In short, presenting AI-generated text as your own work would count as a form of plagiarism: "*using generative AI tools to substantially complete an assignment or exam (e.g. by entering exam or assignment questions) is not permitted. Students should acknowledge the use of generative AI (other than incidental use) and default to disclosing such assistance when in doubt.*"

In brief, here is my class policy on the use of generative AI: it's fine to use it for brainstorming and generating ideas, and at the level of sentences for aid in composition. It may **not** be used to compose any substantial portion of an assignment (such as the text of a presentation, or a contribution to the written discussions on Canvas, or your final paper—or any of the scaffolding assignments such as the prospectus). In keeping with the Honor Code, you will be on your honor to comply with these standards; for my part I will not (and would not be permitted to) attempt to check whether you have allowed an AI tool to write your paper for you. As I understand the situation, such "AI detectors" do not work in any case.

What is important is *transparency*. Let us be clear with each other about our use of such tools. If you do choose to employ AI in any phase of your writing process, I do require a brief additional reflective statement, relating how you used the tool and what you made of the process. This will be discussed further in class. If you employ it in the course of writing your paper, you must include a proper citation, such as you will find here: https://style.mla.org/citing-generative-ai/

We will also experiment with these tools in class exercises, developing texts and critiquing them, as additional ways to explore questions of genre and style.

Readings and Class Activities:

Week 1
DEFINITIONS AND TERMS OF ANALYSIS
Monday, June 24: Shakespeare (after Plutarch), *Julius Caesar* (excerpts on Canvas)

What is a "performance of power?" What kind of questions can we ask about such performances? How do Marc Antony and Brutus perform power? How does an orator relate to their audience?

Wednesday, June 26: Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., *"I Have a Dream"*
Text: https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm
Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I47Y6VHc3Ms
 Malcolm X, *"The Ballot or the Bullet."* (Text: Canvas; audio:
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRNciryImqg&t=38s)

How do we zero in on a manageable research topic? How do we formulate a thesis to argue in a research paper? How do we start to look for sources?

In-class project: formulate a thesis relating to either Dr. King's or Malcom X's speech; put together a preliminary bibliography.

THE FUNERAL ORATION
Week 2
Monday, July 1: Pericles (according to Thucydides), *"Eulogium for the Fallen"*
(https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/pericles-funeralspeech.asp)

Abraham Lincoln, *"Address Delivered at the Dedication of the Cemetery at Gettysburg."*
(Canvas) History and the Rhetoric of Remembrance.

What do we do when we make a public display of mourning? What does a community owe to those who die in its defense? What about those who serve the community in other ways?

Wednesday, July 3: In-class exercise: compose and deliver a pitch for your research project.

GROUPS FORMED FOR COMMUNICATION-STRATEGY PITCH PROJECTS

RESEARCH PROSPECTUS DUE.

Week 3

Monday, July 8: **Eulogy Performances**

FIRST ROUND OF INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS (set up appointments on Canvas; times for these meetings will be spread throughout the week. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss your research-paper prospectus.)

Wednesday, July 10: **Eulogy Performances** (continued).

Week 4

FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND LINCOLN

Monday, July 15: Frederick Douglass, *"What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"*.
        (Canvas)
Wednesday, July 17: Abraham Lincoln, *Second Inaugural Address* (Canvas)

How is an argument structured? How do we appeal to authority? How do we make use of
        ethos, *pathos* and *logos*?

In-class project: compose an opening for your paper with a strong hook: what will pull
        the reader in to continue reading?

Draft of research paper due

Check-in with group projects

Week 5

DESCENT INTO NIGHTMARE: ORATION AS BLUNT INSTRUMENT AND
SEDUCTION

Monday, July 22: Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph des Willens* (video:
        https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6uajey) Look especially at some of the
        speeches around 22:26; Hitler Youth rally at 44:16; parade of flags at 1:01:05 and
        placement of memorial wreath at 1:44.
Kenneth Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's *Battle*."
        (https://www.csun.edu/~hfspc002/442/txt/burke.pdf)

How can you persuade people to use their freedom precisely to give up their freedom?
        How do you move individuals to surrender their individuality?

Wednesday, July 24:
Thursday, May 16: In-class presentation workshop.

SECOND ROUND OF INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS

Week 6

POWER ON DISPLAY

Monday, July 29: Mary Beard, *The Roman* Triumph (Read Chapter 1 only, "Pompey's Finest Hour?" available online through Green Library: https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/13065526);
Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History." (Canvas: Files)

How does the past persist in the present? What is the archeology of our own time?

VOICE, SELF AND POWER: THE REVOLUTION JUST MAY BE TELEVISED
Wednesday, July 31
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *"The Solitude of Self"*
Sojourner Truth, "*Ain't I a Woman?"* (Canvas: Files) Note the link to the different versions of this speech. The multiple versions of this text will be an important issue for us.

Second check-in for group projects

Week 7

OR MAYBE IT'S ALL BS
Monday, August 5:   Harry Frankfurt, *"On Bullshit"*
(http://www2.csudh.edu/ccauthen/576f12/frankfurt__harry_-_on_bullshit.pdf); Barbara Jordan, *"Statement on the Articles of Impeachment"* (video, see link on Canvas in 'Pages')

Wednesday, August 7: **Final Presentations**. (Group projects)

Week 8:

Monday, August 12: **Final Presentations**. (Individual)
Wednesday, August 14: **Final Presentations**. (Individual)

Thursday, August 15: **TERM PAPER FINAL DRAFT DUE BY 11:59PM**
        NO EXTENSIONS BEYOND THIS DATE CAN BE GRANTED