Performance

Kim Benston, English (Seminar Leader)
Koffi Anyinefa, French
Israel Burshatin, Spanish
Aryeh Kosman, Philosophy
Rebekah Kowal, English (Mellon Fellow)
Deborah Roberts, Classics & Comparative Literature
Ulrich Schönherr, German

The Faculty Seminar in the Humanities for 1999-2000 will explore the status “performance” as both cultural figure and historical practice within primarily western, but also African, Asian, and other non-western societies. From a theoretical perspective, the seminar will consider such topics as: the impact of recent literary theory on performance genres, practices, and concepts; the impact of performance on recent literary theory; textuality and performance (language, silence, gesture, the mise en scène); performance and/as ideology (censorship, obscenity, the "laws" of theatrical representation, authority and resistance in drama); performance and the subject (gender-construction, agency, tyranny).

We will also consider how “performance” has operated as a category of scholarly and cultural production in such disciplines as sociology, linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, art history, and folklore, while probing relations among performance modes: stage, film, video, music, dance. Rubrics for possible study thus include:

• The sociology of performance (institutions, generic hierarchies, histories and rhetorics of stage convention).
• Performance and the body (pornography, scopophilia, cross-dressing, pain and pleasure).
• Performance and belief (religion, psychoanalysis, myth, ritual).
• Para-performative forms (graffiti, therapy, shamanism, politics, boxing).
• Intermedia (opera, performance "events," masque, carnival).
• Performance and narration (autobiography, storytelling, translation, vernacular expression).
• Performance and perception (spectatorship, the optics of race, the phenomenology of performance).
• Anti-theatrical performance (agit-prop, cruelty, Verfremdung, chance).
• Romantic, modernist, and post-modernist performance.
• Modern appropriations of earlier drama and the neo-dramatic (mime, puppetry, ceremony, magic).