

TUNI 250 [Simulation in Cultural Criticism]

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Class Material: www.richcourses.com, top menu item "RATCATCHER"

Overview of Course

The Scenario

Welcome to the **Bureau of Adjustable Outcomes (BAO)**.

A **super-secret subunit** of the equally clandestine government agency known as **M.I.S.T. (Multiverse Integrative Simultaneity Taskforce)**, BAO can use M.I.S.T.-engineered **space/time "rips"** to extract especially **competent and intelligent** humans **from one space and time to another**, to accomplish socially useful work by **engineering (adjusting) outcomes** at critical junctures in history, thus setting "history" on an **alternative path**. The **space/time rip** was developed in the **closing days of World War II** by Nazi scientists obsessed with Aryan world domination, then re-engaged for more **benevolent purposes** by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency under the Reagan administration **in the 1980s**.

What apparently was not known, even in intelligence communities, was that one especially **effective subunit** of Hitler's Aryan conspiracy **survived** the end of World War II to form the **Readjustment and Transformation Team (R.T.T.)**, known colloquially (among the few who even knew of their existence) as "**RATTs**."

Fully aware that the actions which most profoundly affect human events often have more to do with **popular culture** than **politics or statecraft**, the RATTs came up with the idea that **arranging the deaths of key figures** in **popular music** could lead to dramatic and unforeseen **upheavals**, particularly among **minority youth**, provoking changes that could aid in their malevolent quest for **Aryan world domination**. Using **space/time relocation**, key individuals and teams were placed at critical junctures in the lives of **emerging musicians** (most often members of **minority populations**), then cutting short their careers by engineering **complex schemes** resulting in their deaths. Among the RATTs, the **ultimate "score"** was to **fashion the targeted musician's termination** in such a way that it looked as if it were due to **accident, misadventure, or self-destructive behavior**—anything other than the **true cause**.

This activity remained **completely hidden from BAO agents** until revelations from their best operative, **Ben Axeltiel**. Axeltiel is BAO'S first declared **non-binary individual** (someone who views their identity as falling **outside** the traditional enclosures of "man" or "woman"). They (non-binary people prefer **the plural pronouns** to the traditional "**she**" or "**he**") stumbled onto RATT's malicious schemes almost by accident, when they were investigating **suspicious involvement** by the Los Angeles Police Department in the late-1990s **shooting deaths** of **African-American males**. The gunning down of **Christopher Wallace** (stage names, "**The Notorious B.I.G.**" or "**Biggie Smalls**") in early hours of March 9, 1997 had **in historical accounts** been variously attributed to a **plot by the LAPD**, or (according to the police) to a **conspiracy** involving Biggie's fellow Blood gang member **Suge Knight**.

Axeltiel's side mission investigating the link concluded that something far more sinister was at work.

Biggie's death proved to be a **key element** in the **East Coast/West Coast "rap wars"** of the mid- to late-1990s, leading to several other killings and a generally **diminished reputation** for **rap** and **hip-hop** performers, fitting perfectly with RATT's goal of **fomenting racial and cultural discord** that could provide the underpinning to grow their loathsome creed of **fear and racial intolerance**.

Following up their initial insight, Axeltiel tirelessly **unraveled** the deaths of Biggie Smalls and then, relying on secreted funds from BAO's highest levels, looked into the deaths of other musicians like **Johnny Ace** (the first true rock-and-roll tragedy), **Selena Quintanilla** (whose death propelled *Tejano* to the position of dominant Latino-pop musical form), and **Tupac Shakur** (the "other coast" murder corresponding to Biggie's killing).

To their **shock and surprise**, there seemed no question that what at first looked like **deaths by misadventure** were in fact **RATT-plotted assassinations**, cunningly arranged to look as if **due to less sinister causes**. In their report to BAO management, Axeltiel pleaded that they to be allowed to do what **no other BAO agent** had ever taken a crack at: to **re-engineer a previously engineered outcome**, undoing the assassination of these key figures, "**adjusting the adjustment**," as it were. Since its inception, BAO had scrupulously **avoided** this course of action, due primarily to its inability to **find an agent** capable of handling such a complex activity, not to mention the **unpredictable repercussions** that might result.

But **Ben Axeltiel** was unique and judged by BAO's leadership fully capable of accomplishing this **extraordinarily dangerous maneuver**. Their willingness to **abandon gender norms** had, in the view of BAO's psychiatrists, led Axeltiel to a state of **dynamic flexibility and awareness** unmatched by any operatives of either BAO or RATT. In addition, they had a passion for their work that drove them to **unparalleled levels of achievement** that might allow them to **survive** such a perilous task. (There was, in addition, a **much less benevolent** motivation: that, in the course of the risky undertaking, Axeltiel **might not survive**, sparing BAO from dealing with their troublesome raising of **questions about gender identity**.)

Given its penchant for acronyms and nicknames, it was perhaps inevitable that BAO gave Ben Axeltiel their dramatic codename...

"Ratcatcher"

Ratcatcher

Course Philosophy

External organizational communication (sometimes called "EOC") has to do with how organizations, or more broadly, social collectivities, use **communication** (often, though not necessarily, **mass communication**) to represent themselves **beyond their organizational "boundaries."** In the modern view, EOC includes not only "classic" forms of representation, such as **advertising, marketing, public relations, and sales**, but newer forms, such as **crisis management, governmental relations/lobbying, and media relations.**

My approach to education is based on **three principles** which, though **commonsensical** and **obvious**, provoke **negative reactions** from some. First, education must not be **drudgery**, but must engage the **spirit** as well as the **brain**. To this extent education, though necessarily involving **hard work** (as all useful activities must), should also be **fun** and involve **play**. Second, **worrying over grades** can be a serious impediment to **creativity** and **learning**. Students afraid they are not doing **what the teacher expects**, as measured by letter grades, often find it difficult to **"let loose"** and learn to trust their **natural instincts**, these being the very guidelines that, no matter what pedagogues theorize, remain the best **impetus to intellectual growth**. Third, the role of the teacher is to **carefully set up and adjust** the course, but once that is done, to stand back and **leave students free** to co-create their educational experience. It should be remembered at all times that all students are **experts** in one or more areas of knowledge likely **closed to the teacher**. For the teacher to pose as **supreme arbiter** of intellectual process in the classroom is **dubious**. The teacher, as a highly-trained professional, is one voice in the classroom, but in this that voice is one voice of many. I would ask you to look at me, **not as a sage on a stage**, but a **guide on the side**.

What Is Expected of You

1. Class preparation and participation. To get the most out of class, you must complete readings and prepare assignments for the days they are assigned. You are expected to contribute to discussion as well as creative activities, based on what you read, observe, and think about. If you come unprepared, you not only miss opportunities to participate, but this will negatively impact your grade.

2. Punctual, consistent attendance. You get one "free" absence; beyond that, each absence results in a deduction from your grade (this includes missing group meetings). You must also be on time. If you come late, you will disrupt the operation of the class, which will make you subject to penalties for class disruption. Attendance is taken by means of a daily roster sheet you will sign. This sheet is final arbiter in disputes over whether you attended on a particular day or not.

3. Grading. Because determination of your letter grade involves crediting you for activities, skills, and creative enterprise not normally evaluated in courses, you should conceive of your performance in terms of an untarnished beginning which you have the power to maintain, provided you attend to the requirements of the class, particularly attendance and contribution to your group's production. You should realize that failure to do so will tarnish that unblemished grade. The focus is on what you, together with your classmates, achieve, and not necessarily (principally) an individual grade. However, to progress to being a fully-fledged participant in the simulation performance, you must attain an aggregate average score of 70% or better on the three exams. That said, after Part One, I don't want you overly concerned about grades, as this will interfere with your creativity and hinder your engagement.

4. Class Writing Assignment. To stimulate reflection on process (essential to experiential learning), the class will, as a collective of the various groups comprising the simulation environment (defined by the class), write, revise, and submit to a refereed journal in the experiential or progressive education fields a scholarly paper, focusing on the theory and process of the class. How, precisely, this will be done is up to the class (as, indeed, is everything about the course). However accomplished, the entire class will claim authorship (the students, not the instructor). If you wonder how that many people can be listed as authors, you need not. While large group authorship is often frowned upon in conventional scholarly publishing, in experiential learning it is celebrated, especially when (as here) it is the product of the participants.

Outline of Course, Week by Week

Part One: A High Art

("I'd rather be dead than cool." [Kurt Cobain])

Date	Topic(s)/Activities	Readings/Study Materials
August 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to course. • Discussion/breakout into teams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course Website (www.richcourses.com, "JH Simulation menu") • Course Syllabus (on Course Website)
September 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First exam (<i>Deaths of Music Icons and Cultural History</i>) • Group work: BAO Ethnography: Into the Hornet's Nest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study Guide, Unit I (<i>Deaths of Music Icons and Cultural History</i>) <p style="text-align: center;">Readings:</p> <p>Required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gallien, L. B. (2002). Keeping it real: Hip-hop culture and the framing of values for contemporary African-American students. <i>Journal of College and Character</i>, 3(8). • Meloy, J. R., & Amman, M. (2016). Public figure attacks in the United States, 1995-2015. <i>Behavioral Sciences and the Law</i>, 34(5), 622-644. • Weinstein, D. (1995). Rock music: Secularisation and its cancellation. <i>International Sociology</i>, 10(2), 185-195. <p>Suggested</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reddick, B. H., & Beresin, E. V. (2002). Rebellious rhapsody: Metal, rap, community, and individuation. <i>Academic Psychiatry</i>, 26(1), 51-59.
September 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second exam (<i>The Targets I: Selena and Johnny Ace</i>) • Group work: Creating Characters and their Backstories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study Guide, Unit II (<i>The Targets I: Selena and Johnny Ace</i>) <p style="text-align: center;">Readings:</p> <p>Required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaspar de Alba, A. (2003). The Chicana/Latina dyad, or identity and perception. <i>Latino Studies</i>, 1, 106-114. • Limon, J. E. (1997). Selena: Sexuality, greater Mexico, and the song and dance with hegemony. <i>Etnofoor</i>, 10(1/2), 90-111. • Salem, J M. (1993). Death and the rhythm-and-bluesman: The life and recordings of Johnny Ace. <i>American Music</i>, 11(3), 316-367. <p>Suggested</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stavans, I. (1996). Santa Selena. <i>Transition</i>, 70, 36-43. • Paredez, D. (2002). Remembering Selena, remembering "Latinidad." <i>Theater Journal</i>, 54(1), 63-84.

September 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third exam (<i>The Targets II: Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls</i>) • Group work: Creating the Organizational Setting • Create plan for group paper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study Guide, Unit III (<i>The Targets II: Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls</i>) <p style="text-align: center;">Readings:</p> <p>Required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collins, M. S. (2006). Biggie envy and the gangsta sublime. <i>Callaloo</i>, 29(3), 911-938. • Morrison, C. D., & Dangerfield, C. L. (2007). Tupac Shakur. In M. Hess (Ed.), <i>Icons of hip-hop: An encyclopedia of the movement, music, and culture</i> (p. 391-415). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. • Peterson, J. (2007). Notorious B.I.G. In M. Hess (Ed.), <i>Icons of hip-hop: An encyclopedia of the movement, music, and culture</i> (p. 417-438). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. <p>Suggested</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nisker, J. (2007). "Only God can judge me": Tupac Shakur, the legal system, and lyrical subversion. <i>Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture</i>, 14(1), 176-196. • Wells-Wilbon, R., Jackson, N. D., & Schiele, J. H. (2010). Lessons from the Maafa: Rethinking the legacy of slain hip-hop icon Tupac Amaru Shakur. <i>Journal of Black Studies</i>, 40(4), 509-526.
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Part Two: Adjustable Outcomes

("I don't have any aspirations to be 70." [Freddie Mercury])

Date	Topic(s)/Activities	Readings/Study
September 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create plan for final script • Group paper: Reflection 1 	All class and reading material (including material applied, as necessary, from website's "Paper Bibliography" collection (79 articles) spanning scholarly work experiential learning).
October 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create first set of scenes • Turn in plan for final script 	All previous class, reading material (see 11/27 entry).
October 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create second set of scenes • Turn in first set of scenes 	All previous class, reading material (see 11/27 entry).
October 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create final script • Turn in third set of scenes • Group paper: Reflection 2 	All previous class, reading material (see 11/27 entry).
October 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn in final script • First full read-through 	All previous class, reading material (see 11/27 entry).

Part Three: Rehearsal

("When I die, sprinkle my ashes over the '80s." [David Lee Roth])

Date	Topic(s)/Activities	Readings/Study Materials
November 1	Production: Art Direction	All previous class, reading material (see 11/27 entry).
November 8	Production: Costumes, Makeup	All previous class, reading material (see 11/27 entry).
November 15	Rehearsal: Blocking Group paper: Reflection 3	All previous class, reading material (see 11/27 entry).
November 29	Dress Rehearsal	All previous class, reading material (see 11/27 entry).

Part Four: Another Opening, Another Show...

*("My mama used to tell me,
if you can't find something to live for,
you best find something to die for." [Tupac Shakur])*

Date	Topic(s)/Activities	Readings/Study Materials
December 6	Dress Rehearsal + Final Performance	All previous class, reading material (see 11/27 entry).
Week of December 12-18 (Designated Final Exam Period)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group paper: • Finalize Article 	All previous reflection sets, classroom experiences.