

Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Performance: History through Praxis

Course Description:

This course provides an introductory overview of selected trajectories in 20th and 21st century performance. While students will read and watch a variety of primary and secondary sources—including artist’s manifestos, plays, film clips, choreographic scores, and scholarly articles—class time and assignments will also allow students to try out the performance traditions covered on the syllabus. The course proposes that an important way to learn about the past is by bringing it into the present through students’ embodied performances.

Over the quarter, we will pay special attention to the ways in which theatrical forms emerge and change in relationship to socio-political events around the globe. In this course, we will not only study theater history for information about the past, but also to explore what specific histories tell us about our present power structures and performance practices.

The course is divided into three units:

1. We will start by framing what it means to study theater history. Which artists are included within the canon of “theater history,” and which are excluded?
2. From this foundation, we will move to a longer unit that traces a series of 20th-century performance developments, beginning with early avant-garde movements like Surrealism, Futurism, and Dadaism.
3. With the final unit, we will explore a series of approaches important to theater and performance makers in the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st.

Course Objectives:

- Gain an understanding about the trends and developments in performance across the 20th and 21st centuries through linking historical sources with embodied praxis.
- Contextualize aesthetic movements in theater in relationship to larger socio-political events.
- Understand the differences between performance methods and genres through performance.
- Practice reading primary documents (e.g., manifestos and plays) as a means to hone analytical skills.
- Learn how to effectively use and integrate academic research into performance work.
- Participate in class discussions by sharing ideas and responding to other students’ contributions.

Course Requirements and Expectations:

Mini Research Assignment

Throughout the quarter, you will be asked to undertake two performance-based research projects. While one component of both of these projects will be a performance and/or its documentation, the success of these performances will depend upon your ability to successfully integrate historical research into your work.

To ensure all students are fully prepared, you will complete a series of questions designed to familiarize you with the University's research resources. At the end of Week One, the instructor will circulate a list of artists (not covered in class) associated with the various movements include on the syllabus. After choosing one artist, you are responsible for answering these questions:

1. What performances/works is your artist known for?
2. Are there drawings, photographs, or film clips available of their work? If yes, where? If no, why (e.g., because they worked before such technologies were widely available)?
3. What scholars have written about your artist? What discipline(s) are those scholars from? Your sources should include: a scholar who has written a book (and check that book out of the library), a review written by another scholar of said book (these are typically a few pages long and are published in most peer-reviewed journals), and a peer-reviewed journal article.
4. Locate a non-scholarly source about your artist (e.g., Wikipedia). What are some differences between the scholarly sources you've found and your non-scholarly source? What types of information does each give you?
5. What types of information did you have a hard time discovering (e.g., is there limited biographical information available)?

Your response to the above prompts should: adhere to MLA formatting guidelines (i.e., 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, double spaced, footnotes or endnotes, 1 inch margins). The mini research project is due in class, as a hard copy, in Week Three.

Performance Project One: Historical Re-enactment

After completing the course's second unit, Performance Movements, you will present a five-minute rehearsed performance in class in Week Seven and Eight. Performances will be based on one of the performance movements covered in class and should be grounded in historical research.

You are tasked with:

- Re-creating (based upon film, photographs, or written descriptions) a historical performance.
- As appropriate, your in-class performances should include costumes, props, or accompanying music. (When devising these performances, bear in mind the restrictions of the classroom and be mindful of not creating unmanageable messes, etc.)

While you can perform in groups of up to five, each of you is responsible for a five page artist statement that:

- Describes the intention behind the performance;
- Incorporates your historical research;
- Outlines any challenges you encountered during the project (e.g., you chose to re-create a historical dance performance that is only documented through photographs); and
- Adheres to MLA formatting guidelines (i.e., 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, double spaced, footnotes or endnotes, work cited page, 1 inch margins).

Artist statements are due in class Week Seven. In Week Five, you and your group are required to meet with the instructor to discuss your performance ideas. You should come to this meeting with a clear idea about your performance and a list of sources useful for your project.

In class, we will devise a grading rubric for your group (or solo) performances and artist statements. This is a chance for you to articulate what skills you see this project honing and how you would like those skills evaluated.

Performance Project Two: Applying the Past to Our Present

Throughout the quarter, we will look at a variety of artists who, in overt or subtle ways, responded to the social, political, and cultural climate of their day. Your final project is to create a ten-minute performance piece inspired by a current political, social, or cultural event that interests/provokes/angers you.

Your performance might take the form of a play script, a video, or a written score for a performance art piece. You will **not** perform your piece in class, so with the instructor you will discuss the best way to document and explain your performance. (Students who wish to write a play will find this relatively easy, while a student who wishes to create a public site-specific performance will have to think more creatively about how she might articulate the breadth of her project.)

While your performance project will respond to our moment, it should be grounded in the aesthetics of an historic performance movement covered in class. You should, however, feel free to update your chosen form to respond to the political changes and technological innovations of today. For example, you might take inspiration from Isadora Duncan's expressive movement vocabulary, yet update her modern dance practice to respond to current notions around queerness and gender-fluidity.

You are responsible for turning in a 5-8-page artist statement that:

- Describes the intention behind the performance, laying out the current issue your performance seeks to address;
- Articulates your chosen artist/art form's political/social engagement; and
- Adheres to MLA formatting guidelines (i.e., 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, double spaced, footnotes or endnotes, work cited page, 1 inch margins).

Likewise, you must turn in some documentation of your performance:

- You will meet with the instructor in Week Seven to discuss what this might look like.
- If your project includes text, you must turn in a script of that text.
- For movement-based projects, a detailed choreographic score and/or filmed performance of the piece will suffice.
- While a written text or video are two methods for presenting your work, there are a myriad of ways you might approach this project! Explore!

Participation

In-Class Participation:

You should arrive to class on time having completed the reading specified on the syllabus, and

with questions and ideas about the reading. You should contribute to the class discussion through thoughtful comments/attentive listening.

You will be graded based upon your in-class participation as follows:

- An “A” student enlivens the classroom with her/his engaging questions and discussions. Her/his remarks are insightful and encourage fellow classmates to think differently about class materials. For example, an A student might relate course content to a recent news article she read or readings from another course.
- A “B” grade for participation is given to students who participate but who do so in a more passive fashion. For example, a “B” student might raise questions but does not always listen to peers’ contributions or waits for other students to open a discussion before speaking.
- A “C” is given to a student who may attend classes regularly but refrains from participation.

In-Class Assignments:

The last five minutes of each class will be spent doing an in-class writing exercise. Each student will be asked to think about the performances, readings, and lecture material discussed that day in terms of 1) how they relate to previous movements/artists and 2) how contemporary theater/performance draws upon the historical movement under consideration.

Note: missing more than 2 classes will cause a 5% reduction to your final grade for every subsequent class missed (so if you miss 3 classes, you will lose 5% from your final grade; 4 classes missed will result in a 10% deduction, etc.).

Cell phones must be turned off before class begins and remain off through the duration of class. Classroom courtesy includes the full participation of every student.

Readings:

The majority of readings will be available as a course reader for purchase. Students will need to secure copies of several additional texts:

- *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader* edited by Michael Huxley and Noel Witts
- *Saint Joan of the Stockyards: A Drama* by Bertolt Brecht
- *Ubu and the Truth Commission* by Jane Taylor

Grades:

Grading Breakdown

Mini Research Assignment: 15%

Participation: 20%

 In-class participation: 10%

 In-class assignments: 10%

Performance Project One: 30%

 Performance: 10%

 Artist Statement: 20%

Performance Project Two: 35%

 Artist Statement: 15%

 Performance document: 20%

Grading Scale

97-100 A+

87-89 B+

77-79 C+

67-69 D+

59-below F

94-96 A 84-86 B 74-76 C 64-66 D
90-93 A- 80-83 B- 70-73 C- 60-63 D-

Plagiarism:

The school's rules on academic integrity must be followed; students will be held accountable for any violations of school policy.

Calendar:

Part I: What is Theater history?

WEEK ONE

Seminar One

Introduction to course and review of syllabus and assignments

Seminar Two

How do we Learn History?

- Marcie R. Rendon, *Songcatcher* (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 2008).

WEEK TWO

Seminar One

How do we Preserve Performance?

- Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
 - "Acts of Transfer," pages 1-33.

In class: Discuss research tools and resources available to students. Discuss Mini Research Assignment and answer students' questions.

Part II: Performance Movements

Seminar Two

Realisms, Part I

- Georgia Douglas Johnson, *Plumes* (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 2002).
- Susan Glaspell, *Trifles* (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 2004).

In-class activity: Read scenes from plays.

WEEK THREE

Seminar One

Realisms: Socialist Realism, Part II

- Maksim Gorky, *Soviet Writers' Congress 1934: The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism in the Soviet Union* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977). [Excerpts]
- Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, eds., *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
 - Vsevolod Meyerhold, "First Attempts at a Stylized Theater," pages 303-313.
- Watch in class: Excerpts from the Soviet musical *Cossacks of Kuban* (1949).

In-class activity: Learn Meyerhold biomechanics exercises.

Due in class: Mini Research Assignment.

Seminar Two

Expressionism

- Sophie Treadwell, *Machinal* (London: Royal National Theater, Nick Hern Books, 1993).

In-class activity: Stage specific scenes from *Machinal*, thinking about how to stage the humanization of the machine and/or the mechanization of the person.

WEEK FOUR

Seminar One

Modern Dance, Part I

- Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, eds., *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
 - Isadora Duncan, “The dancer of the future,” pages 171-177.
 - Mary Wigman, “The philosophy of modern dance,” pages 402-406.

In-class activity: Create movement based upon Duncan’s dance philosophy.

Seminar Two

Modern Dance, Part II

- Anthea Kraut, “Between Primitivism and Diaspora: the Dance Performances of Josephine Baker, Zora Neale Hurston, and Katherine Dunham,” *Theater Journal* 55.3 (2003): 433-450.
- Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
 - “Her own Skin,” and “What bananas say,” pages 1-16 and 35-48.

WEEK FIVE

Seminar One

In class writing workshop and discussion of performance project (divide into groups in class as need be.)

Seminar Two

Dada and Futurism

- Bert Cardullo and Robert Knopf, eds., *Theater of the Avant-Garde, 1890-1950: A Critical Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
 - Tristan Tzara, *The Gas Heart*.
 - Tristan Tzara, *Dada Manifesto, 1918*.
- Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, eds., *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
 - F.T. Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” pages 289-294.

Gwyneth Shanks, sample syllabus

In-class activity: Perform Dada manifestos in small groups, translating Dada's visual aesthetics into a performance aesthetic.

Required: Meet with instructor outside of class to discuss performance project. (Make sure you come to meeting with a clear idea and a list of sources to use in project.)

WEEK SIX

Seminar One

Theater of Cruelty

- Bert Cardullo and Robert Knopf, eds., *Theater of the Avant-Garde, 1890-1950: A Critical Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
 - Antonin Artaud, *The Spurt of Blood*.
- Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, eds., *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
 - Antonin Artaud, "Theater and Cruelty," pages 33-36.

Seminar Two

Epic Theater

- Bertolt Brecht and John Willett, eds., *Brecht on Theater: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).
 - The Street Scene.
 - The Modern Theater is the Epic Theater.
 - Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting.
- Bertolt Brecht, *Saint Joan of the Stockyards: A Drama* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1970).

In-class activity: Focus on *gestus*, generating set movement(s) to represent character.

Required: Meet with instructor outside of class to discuss final performance projects.

WEEK SEVEN

Seminar One

Performance Art

- Jieun Rhee, "Performing the Other: Yoko Ono's Cut Piece," *Art History* 28.1 (2005): 96-118.
- Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Against the body: interpreting Ana Mendieta," *Traces: Ana Mendieta*, ed., Stephanie Rosenthal (London: Hayward Pub., 2013).

Seminar Two

In class presentations of students' performance projects.

Due in class: Artist statements and manifestos.

WEEK EIGHT

Seminar One

In-class presentations of students' performance projects.

Part III: Performance Strategies

Seminar Two

Staging 'Truth'

- Alison Forsyth and Christopher Megson, eds., *Get Real: Documentary Theater Past and Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
 - Janelle Reinelt, "The Promise of Documentary Theater."
- Jane Taylor, *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998).

WEEK NINE

Seminar One

Activist Stages

- Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed* (New York: Theater Communications Group, 1985). [Excerpts]
- Los Angeles Poverty Department, *Agents & Assets: Witnessing the War on Drugs and on Communities* (Queens, NY: Queens Museum, 2014).
 - John Malpede, ed., "Script of Agents & Assets."

In-class activity: Theater of the Oppressed activities

Seminar Two

Staging Gender and Sexuality

- Sue Ellen Case, *Split Britches: Lesbian Practice/Feminist Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
 - *Belle Reprieve*.
- John Clum and Sean Metzger, eds., *Awkward Stages: Plays about Growing up Gay* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2015).
 - A. Rey Pamatmat, *Edith can shoot things and hit them*.

WEEK TEN

Seminar One

Staging Race

- Josephine Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention: Gilbert and Sullivan's The Mikado* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
 - "Titipu Comes to America: Hot and Cool Mikados," pages 121-140.

Seminar Two

Staging Place

- Nato Thompson, ed., *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).
 - Carol Becker, "Microutopias: public practice in the public sphere," pages 64-71

WEEK ELEVEN

Due the Friday of Final's Week: Final performance projects.