

MODERN DRAMA: EXPERIMENTS IN 20TH CENTURY PERFORMANCE

New York University
Department of English / Program in Dramatic Literature
DRLIT-UA 113

Mondays, 2:00-4:45 p.m., 194 Mercer Street, Room 210

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Office Hours: Thursdays (2-5 p.m.); and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course surveys a range of experimental theater practices in the twentieth century. But what do we mean by terms like “experimental,” “avant-garde,” and “postdramatic” theater? And what performance techniques, audience provocations, and radical politics have manifested under these monikers in Europe and America? We will read (about) and watch a number of landmark performances from a variety of national contexts and theatrical traditions, in order to explore thematic and formal experiments with the “modern” theater and its aftermath by directors, actors, playwrights, designers, choreographers, and ensembles. We will investigate questions that include: the contested status of the dramatic text; the rise of the director’s theater; the relationship between performance and interdisciplinary art practices; the shift away from psychological realism; and artists’ explorations of the fusions between art and life. Our reading, watching, and thinking about an experimental history of twentieth-century theater will also consider the sociocultural, economic, political, and aesthetic conditions that animate these different performance practices.

READINGS:

- J. Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theater*
- T. Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole: An Exercise in Theater*

These titles are available for a reasonable price at the NYU bookstore or online. All other course readings are available as PDFs for download from the course page on the NYU Classes website (indicated below as “NYUC”). *Please* come to class with *hardcopies* of the day’s readings on hand.

REQUIREMENTS:

Class Participation

An essential part of a vibrant society is an informed, thoughtful citizenry, empowered to ask questions about their social world. I encourage you to practice that mode of critical engagement in the classroom. To do so, you *must* come prepared, having read and considered the assigned readings, ready to grapple with, discuss, and debate the texts, performances, and critical frameworks at hand. I urge you to do so with respect and empathy for all of your interlocutors (on the page, stage, and in the seminar room). Each student is permitted one unexcused absence; all other absences must be cleared with me. Please refrain from using your cell phone in class. Laptop usage is permitted to take

notes only, and again, please come to class with *hardcopy printouts* of the day's readings, marked-up and worked-through.

Class Visit(s) to the Theater

As a group, we will attend a production of Mette Ingvartsen's *7 Pleasures* at the Skirball Center here at NYU on Friday, September 29. My hope is that the tickets for this show will be paid for by the NYU Department of English (though I am still waiting for confirmation on this). If we have to pay for the tickets ourselves, I will do my best to get us a very fair price (less than \$15). This performance is required and will form the basis of your 3-page critical reflection/performance analysis (described below). We may attend a second performance of Big Dance Theater's *17c* at BAM later in the semester, but I am still waiting on budgetary and logistical confirmation – more on this soon.

In-Class Presentations: Collaborative Ensemble Performance

You will collaboratively co-create one experimental performance project this semester inspired by the class's subject-matter. There will be six slots corresponding to six of the topics/artists that we are exploring together. This project includes two parts: a live performance and a summary of the performance score (we will talk about what we mean by "score"), conceived collaboratively by your group. The live, in-class performance part should last less than 12 minutes and should use the temporal, spatial, gestural, aural, verbal, and collective medium of the seminar space to experiment with alternate ways of exploring, testing, workshopping, critiquing, thinking through the work and/or artist at hand. This is not a traditional frontal pedagogical presentation, but rather is meant to open up your thinking/feeling about how form and idea mutually constitute and challenge each other. It is up to you to design the format and direction of your presentation. You can perform as a critic/commentator, a theater student, a dramatic character, a performance artist, a videographer, etc. This performance experiment will of necessity be a fragment, but it should be memorized and rehearsed. Remember: a project's duration has little to do with its quality – longer doesn't make it better! Part two, the collaborative paper, may range from 1 paragraph to 2 pages and should be handed in on the day of the performance. These projects should be thought of as your own personal exploration of the productive, provocative, and experimental conjunctions between the academic *AND* the creative. You will receive a group grade for the ensemble project – the same grade for each member of the ensemble.

Written Assignments

1) **Provocation Posts:** You are responsible for two 1-to-2-page provocations over the course of the semester. These short writing assignments will be posted in the "Forum" section of our NYU Classes page by 10PM on Saturday evenings and will form the basis of our discussion in class on Monday. You will be expected to read your colleagues' work and bring thoughts and questions into class. The goal for these provocations is to call our (and your own) attention to 2 to 4 "moments" in the materials we are reading/watching for that week. These "moments" could be a sentence, a paragraph, a literal movement of a performance that strikes you, confuses you, excites you, angers you, etc. These posts are meant to be idea-generators for you and for us. You can engage with your chosen "moments" in the form of questions, responses, or even (the beginning of) arguments. But the hope is that you will isolate specific moments that you would like to engage critically and in greater depth and begin to perform that critical engagement in writing, which will then form the basis for our collective engagement as a group. While these provocations will not be graded (in order

to allow you free reign in terms of style and content), they are required and constitute a significant portion of your grade (15%).

2) 3-to-4-page **Critical Reflection/Performance Analysis:** In conversation with 1-2 of the texts/performances we have read/watched so far, write a critical reflection/performance analysis of Mette Ingvartsen's *7 Pleasures*. The goal for these reflections/analyses is to bring the course's readings/watchings from previous weeks into conversation with Ingvartsen's performance, and to begin to think about how the two might inform one another. These should be polished pieces of argumentative writing. They should engage critically and in detail with both the (theoretical/artistic) readings/watchings and the live performance. Keep in mind that this paper should include both description AND analysis of Ingvartsen's performance. All papers must have a clear thesis statement that makes an original claim. Though I am interested in what engages you (and how much you like, or not, the performance), your task in this exercise is to relate those experiences/elements back to the issues of the course. This is NOT a review or summary of the show, rather a short essay about how the production relates to the ideas we are exploring together. **(DUE: Friday, October 6 by email before 5 p.m.)**

3) One 12-to-13-page **Research Paper:** Your final essay will be based on original research developed in conversation with me and with your colleagues in class. The essay should advance an original argument based on an issue of your choice pertaining to one of the topics raised in our course. It should address questions that are both theoretical and aesthetic. Your analyses may be based on readings, "watchings," primary and secondary sources, and additional research. Your analysis must consult at least three secondary sources. You may write about an artist who is not on the list of artists we study together with my permission, if you make a persuasive case that your subject speaks to the concerns of the class. You must come and talk to me in office hours by the beginning of November to discuss your ideas. Working drafts of your essays will be circulated to a partner (or two) on Wednesday, December 6. And on the final day of class, you will present an abstract of your final paper and workshop your draft material with classmates to help generate ideas and revisions for your final draft. Full participation in this process constitutes its own portion of your paper grade (you'll earn 5% for process and 20% for the final paper, adding up to 25% of your total grade).

EVALUATION:

You will be evaluated on your thoughtful participation and the level of your contribution to the discourse of the class, as well as the timely completion and responsible composition of your written work throughout the semester. There will be no extensions on any of your assignments. Course evaluation will be based on the requirements as follows:

Participation **20%**

Collaborative Ensemble Performance **20%**

Provocation Posts **15%**

Critical Reflection/Performance Analysis **20%**

Research Paper **25%**

COURSE SCHEDULE (*subject to change and revision*)

WEEK 1: SEPTEMBER 11

INTRODUCTIONS + CONCEPTUAL SOURCES 1: M. DUCHAMP

Read: A. Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theater: A History*, 1-25 [NYUC]

Read: M. Duchamp, "The Richard Mutt Case," "The Creative Act," and "Apropos of 'Readymades'" [NYUC]

Watch: *Marcel Duchamp-Archive Footage* [3:50]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHG97HDiQZA>

Watch: *Duchamp "Fountain"* [6:10]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2Y5mUJiaZI>

WEEK 2: SEPTEMBER 18

CONCEPTUAL SOURCES 2: G. STEIN & A. ARTAUD

Read: A. Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theater: A History*, 26-41 [NYUC]

Read: G. Stein, "Plays" [NYUC]

Read: A. Artaud, "No More Masterpieces," "Theater of Cruelty Manifesto," and "On the Balinese Theater" [NYUC]

WEEK 3: SEPTEMBER 25

J. CAGE, M. CUNNINGHAM & BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

Read: J. Cage, "Experimental Music" and "Lecture on Nothing" [NYUC]

Watch: J. Cage, 4'33" for piano: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HypmW4Yd7SY>

Read: M. Kirby & R. Schechner, "Interview with John Cage" [NYUC]

Read: W. Fetterman, "The 1952 Untitled Event" and "The Musicircus" [NYUC]

Watch: J. Cage & M. Cunningham, *Variations V* [watch at least 15 minutes]: https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity|video_work|2140092

SEPTEMBER 29: CLASS THEATER VISIT

METTE INGVARSEN'S 7 PLEASURES

Location: The Skirball Center @ NYU

Time: 7:30 p.m. (meet in the lobby of the theater at 7:15 p.m.)

WEEK 4: OCTOBER 2

HAPPENINGS & FLUXUS: A. KAPROW & Y. ONO

Read: M. Kirby, "Happenings: An Introduction" [NYUC]

Read: A. Kaprow, "A Statement" and "18 Happenings in 6 Parts" [NYUC]

Watch: Y. Ono, *Cut Piece* [9:19]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYJ3dPwa2tl>

Read: J.M. Harding, "Between Material and Matrix: Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* and the Unmaking of Collage" [NYUC]

WEEK 5: OCTOBER 9 – NO CLASS

WEEK 6: OCTOBER 16 (*Class held in the Fales Collection on the 3rd floor of Bobst Library*)

"POST-MODERN DANCE" IN GREENWICH VILLAGE: JUDSON DANCE THEATER

Read: S. Banes, "Introduction to the Wesleyan Paperback Edition" and "The Aesthetics of Denial" in *Terpischore in Sneakers* [NYUC]

Read: Y. Rainer, "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or An Analysis of *Trio A*" [NYUC]

WEEK 7: OCTOBER 23

FEMINIST PERFORMANCE ART IN GREENWICH VILLAGE : C. SCHNEEMANN

Read: C. Schneeman, selections from *More Than Meat Joy* [NYUC]

Read: R. Schneider, selections from *The Explicit Body in Performance* [NYUC]

Read: K. Stiles, “Schlagt Auf: The Problem with Carolee Schneemann’s Painting” [NYUC]

Watch: C. Schneeman, *Meat Joy*

WEEK 8: OCTOBER 30

THE LIVING THEATER

Read: R. Schechner, “Six Axioms for Environmental Theater” [NYUC]

Read: J. Malina & J. Beck, *Paradise Now* [NYUC]

Watch: *Paradise Now* [46:03]: http://ubu.com/film/living_paradise.html

WEEK 9: NOVEMBER 6

THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

Read: H. Elam, “An Initiation into the Rituals of Social Protest Theater” [NYUC]

Read: L. Neal, “The Black Arts Movement” [NYUC]

Read: S. Sanchez, *The Bronx is Next* [NYUC]

Read: E. Bullins, *It Bees Dat Way* and *A Short Play for a Small Theater* [NYUC]

WEEK 10: NOVEMBER 13

J. GROTOWSKI’S POOR THEATER

Read: L. Wolford, “General Introduction: Ariadne’s Thread” [NYUC]

Read: J. Grotowski, “Preface,” “Towards a Poor Theater,” “Theater’s New Testament,” “Theater is an Encounter,” “Akropolis: Treatment of the Text,” and “Statement of Principles” in *Towards a Poor Theater*

Watch: *Akropolis*

NOVEMBER 14-15: (**POSSIBLE**) 2ND CLASS THEATER VISIT

17C BY BIG DANCE THEATER

Location: BAM Harvey Theater – 651 Fulton Street, *Brooklyn*

Time: 7:30 p.m. (meet in the lobby of the theater at 7:15 p.m.)

WEEK 11: NOVEMBER 20

POSTMODERN DANCE: P. BAUSCH

Read: R. Hoghe & S. Tree, “The Theater of Pina Bausch” [NYUC]

Read: K. Elswit, “Ten Evenings with Pina Bausch” [NYUC]

Watch: *Café Muller* [49:18]: http://www.ubu.com/dance/bausch_muller.html

Watch: *Pina* directed by Wim Wenders

WEEK 12: NOVEMBER 27

T. KANTOR’S THEATER OF DEATH & MEMORY

Read: J. Klossowicz, “Tadeusz Kantor’s Journey” [NYUC]

Read: T. Kantor, selections from *A Journey Through Other Spaces* [NYUC]

Read: T. Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole*

Watch: *Wielopole, Wielopole* [1:43:00]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M39RhNan_Qs

WEEK 13: DECEMBER 4

POSTDRAMATIC THEATER: HEINER MÜLLER & ROBERT WILSON

Read: C. Weber, "The Pressure of Experience"

Read: H. Müller, *Hamletmachine* [NYUC]

Read: D. Bathrick, "Robert Wilson, Heiner Müller, and the Preideological" [NYUC]

Watch: *Hamletmachine* [1:48:00] directed by Robert Wilson (in German) [NYUC]

WEEK 14 (PART 1): DECEMBER 11

THE WOOSTER GROUP

Read: D. Savran, selections from *Breaking the Rules* [NYUC]

Read: S. Gray & E. LeCompte, *Rumstick Road* [NYUC]

Watch: *Rumstick Road* by The Wooster Group

WEEK 14 (PART 2): DECEMBER 12

FINAL PERFORMANCE RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS/PEER-PAPER-WORKSHOP

EMAIL FAQ:

I look forward to getting to know you over the course of the semester and am excited to hear from you if you would like to set up a time to speak in office hours. However, do keep in mind that I check my email only once each weekday afternoon. In most cases, please expect to wait 24 hours to hear back from me. Please be sure if you are emailing about a time sensitive issue that you leave an appropriate amount of time for a response from me.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

All students are responsible for understanding and complying with the NYU College of Arts and Science Statement on Academic Integrity. Please familiarize yourself with that statement, which is available at: <http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity>. Under **NO** circumstances will academic dishonesty or plagiarism be tolerated in this course.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS AND HEALTH:

This class welcomes students with visible and invisible disabilities and will meet all and any academic accommodations to which a student is entitled. Accommodations may be made for students registered through the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities. For assistance in obtaining an accommodation, contact the Moses Center [719 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-4980)]. Your health and safety are a priority at NYU. If you experience any health or mental health issues during this course, we encourage you to utilize the support services of the 24/7 NYU Wellness Exchange (212-443-9999).

MORE ON WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

- Please submit all assignments as PDF documents.
- Assignments for this course should be written in twelve-point, standard font (Garmond or Times New Roman), with 1-inch margins, double-spaced.
- The stipulated length of an assignment indicates the number of full pages I expect it will take to satisfy the terms of the assignment. A first page with a large header section, or a page with big block quotes, is not quite a full page, and you should be aware of this so that you can make sure to take the full amount of time and space the assignment requires.

- Always include a “Works Cited” page with full bibliographic information for each text you cite (even if you’re only citing one). Throughout the paper, make sure to give a page number for each citation of the text. If you have questions about formatting either your in-text citations/footnotes or your Works Cited page, please consult the Chicago Manual of Style.
- Assignments turned in after the deadline will be marked down. Very late assignments will not receive credit.
- If you’re having trouble with an assignment, or you anticipate a problem with a specific deadline, I encourage you to talk to me about it as soon as possible. Please don’t wait until the last minute.

GRADING CRITERIA:

A = Excellent (A+: 100-97; A: 96-94; A-: 93-90)

This work demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of course material and presents thoughtful interpretations, well-focused and original insights and well-reasoned analysis. “A” work includes skillful use of source materials and illuminating examples and illustrations. “A” work is fluent, thorough and shows some creative flair.

B = Good (B+: 89-87; B: 86-84; B-: 83-80)

This work demonstrates a complete and accurate understanding of course material, presenting a reasonable degree of insight and broad level of analysis. Work reflects competence, but stays at a general or predictable level of understanding. Source material, along with examples and illustrations, are used appropriately. “B” work is reasonable, clear, appropriate and complete.

C = Adequate/Fair (C+: 79-77; C: 76-74; C-: 73-70)

This work demonstrates a basic understanding of course material but remains incomplete, superficial or expresses some important errors or weaknesses. Source material may be used inadequately or somewhat inappropriately. The work may lack concrete, specific examples and illustrations and may be hard to follow or vague.

D = Unsatisfactory (D+: 69-67; D: 66-64; D-: 63-60)

This work demonstrates a serious lack of understanding and fails to demonstrate the most rudimentary elements of the course assignment. Sources may be used inappropriately or not at all. The work may be inarticulate or extremely difficult to read.

F = Failed (Below 60)

Work was not submitted or completed according to parameters (page length, topical focus, types of sources), or completely failed to express the most basic and elementary aspects of the course.

Plus (+) or minus (-) grades indicate your range within the aforementioned grades.