

RADICALLY CURATING RADICAL PERFORMANCE

New York University
Department of English / Program in Dramatic Literature
DRLIT-UA 301

Thursdays, 11:00 a.m. - 1:45 p.m., NYU Skirball Rehearsal Room

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Course Description:

Debates and dialogues are raging around the “curatorial turn” in theatre and performance. As a result, the performance curator has emerged as a pivotal figure who works to navigate and re-articulate this evolving interdisciplinary arts environment at both the artistic and institutional levels. How might the curator help us to imagine alternative organizational structures in the arts and beyond based on camaraderie, empathy, and love? Or on uncertainty, ephemerality, and chaos? In this course, we will examine performance curation through the curator's role as researcher, interpreter, commissioner, collaborator, and producer. We will take on a range of theories and performance practices, and invite special guests – curators, artistic directors, theatre makers – to help us think in different ways about the relations between theatre/performance and the institutions that support them. Topics addressed will include: histories of radical performance, contemporary aesthetics, festivals, new forms of experimental organization, and hands-on practical engagement with the nitty-gritty realities of curatorial practice.

Readings:

All readings are available as PDFs for download from our NYU Classes site. Please come to class with *hard copies* 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. We 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. We 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 the instructors. 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.

2 Class Visits to NYU Skirball

As a group, we will attend two productions at NYU Skirball this term: Jerome Bel's *Gala* on Thursday, March 1, and Gob Squad's *War & Peace* on Thursday, March 29. Tickets for these shows will be paid for by the NYU Department of English. Both performances are required and will form the basis of writing assignment described below.

Critical Artist Profile Presentation

One of our tasks in this course is to begin to curate an archive of "radical" artists working today. The goal of this assignment is two-fold: 1) Over the course of the term, we will develop a collective sense of the different kinds of work that constitute so-called "contemporary practice" in theater, dance, performance, and the interdisciplinary arts. 2) This living archive might also be useful as you are considering who and what to curate for your final project proposals (more on this below). We will provide you with a list of artists to consider. You will then select a day on the syllabus for which you will be responsible for researching one artist or ensemble and preparing a 5-7 minute *inter-media* presentation. This is a *critical* artist profile; it is *not* a book report about the artists' biography. The form of the presentation is up to you (you may be creative!), but the presentation should analytically address essential aspects of the artists' work (and put forth original claims you want to make about that work) based on original research. Within the presentation we ask you to: introduce one or two seminal works by the artist or ensemble; consider the aesthetic and critical lineage from which that work emerges; analyze where the work falls within "contemporary practice"; examine critical or theoretical issues that interest the artist and/or their critics (based on your research). In addition to your presentation, you will construct a 1-page performative summary of your findings and post it to the archive on the "Forum" section of our NYU Classes page.

Written Assignments

1) 5-page **Critical Curatorial Reflection** (*due in class on April 5th*)

In conversation with at least 2 of the texts assigned so far, write a critical curatorial reflection that addresses **either** *Gala* **or** *War & Peace*. The goal for these reflections is to bring the course's readings from previous weeks into active conversation with the live performance (its aesthetic, theoretical, and political aspects) and to begin to think about its larger place within the Skirball season. Why would this performance be included in the season? How do the themes and methods of the performance raise important questions about: audience, institution, politics (be they geo-politics or the politics of identity or...)? These should be polished pieces of argumentative writing. Keep in mind that this paper should include analysis of your chosen performance in order to ground your critical claims about curatorial rationale. All papers should advance an original, argumentative claim. Though we are 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 broader issues of the course. In other words, this is *not* a review or summary of the show, rather a short essay about how the production relates to the ideas about curation we are exploring together using Skirball as a case study.

2) 15-page **Group Project Proposal & Presentation (for an Original Curated Event)**

As we move into the final part of the semester, we will explore just what it means to put curatorial theory into actual practice. Working in groups, you will conceive, research, and propose an original curated *event*. The idea (and hope) is to let your imagination run wild, and to conceive of an “event” - be it a season, festival, or other interdisciplinary happening -- you would really like to curate. The event will include 5 artists or ensembles of your choosing. You will be responsible for crafting a successful proposal in support of your project, which will include: title, tag line, event description & rationale (aesthetic, political, economic, etc.), proposed artists & rationale, critical descriptions (and samples) of artists’ work, schedule & rationale, budget (knowing you can expect 40% from ticket sales *if* you decide to charge for tickets), and at least one alternative fundraising strategy (to account for at least 20% of the budget). The final project consists of two parts: 1) the proposals, which will be 15 pages in length, and due to the entire class via the NYU Classes “Forum” on **April 30 by 5 p.m.**; and 2) an *inter-media* presentation of the proposed event during our final class, which will serve as fodder (in addition to the written proposal) for a group deliberation about each proposal and ultimate choice of the “winning” proposal. We will talk about this project in *much* more detail as the semester progresses, and there will be ample time to hone your ideas in conversation with your group -- and with guidance from Jay and Brandon.

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%**

Artist Profile Presentations: **15%**

Critical Curatorial Reflections: **20%**

Group Project Proposal & Presentation: **45%** (*15% for the presentation, 30% for the written proposal*)

Course Schedule (*subject to change and revision*)

Week 1: Thursday, January 25

Part 1: Introductions

Part 2: What is Performance Curation?

Read: J. Ritsema, “About Programmers & Curators”

Read: T. Sellar, “The Curatorial Turn”

Read: B. Ferdman, “From Content to Context”

Optional: S. Jackson, ”Curating the Performing Arts in the Age of Performance” :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmIvZiYmgeA>

Curator as...

Week 2: Thursday, February 1

Contemporary Foundations #1: Curating Between Visual & Performing Arts

In Class: Artist Archive Presentation #1

Read: P. O’Neill, “The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse”

Read: J.-P. Martinon, “Theses in the Philosophy of Curating”

Read: B. v. Bismarck, “Relations In Motion”

Read: H. U. Obrist, “Diaghilev is the Most Important Curator...”

Week 3: Thursday, February 8

Contemporary Foundations #2: Performative Performing Arts Curation

In Class: Artist Archive Presentation #2

Read: S. Jackson, “Performative Curating Performs”

Read: F. Malzacher, “Feeling Alive: The Performative Potential of Curating”

Read: F. Malzacher, “Cause & Result”

Read: R. Schneider, “Dead Hare, Live”

Week 4: Thursday, February 15

Part 1: The (International) Festival Circuit

Read: A. Lazaridis Ferguson, “Symbolic Capital & Relationships of Flow”

Read: Guest Profiles: *To Be Determined*

Part 2: Curator’s Panel #1: Theater & Performance Spaces/Festivals

Visit from: Mark Russell (Under the Radar) and Lili Chopra (FIAF)

Curator as Radical Researcher...

Week 5: Thursday, February 22

Curator as Dramaturg

In Class: Artist Archive Presentation #3

Read: K. Profeta, “Introduction” & “Interculturalism” in *Dramaturgy in Motion*

Read: K. Trencsényi & B. Cochrane (eds.), selections from *New Dramaturgy*

Read: G. Lester, “Dramaturgs as Artistic Leaders”

Week 6: Thursday, March 1 -- **Class Held at MoMA PS1**

Curator as Performance (Art) Historian

Read: D. Taylor, selections from *The Archive and the Repertoire*

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

Read: S. Comer, "Museum of Modern Art"

**** Required Performance:** Jerome Bel's *Gala @ NYU Skirball* on March 1st **

** Time: 7:30 p.m. (meet inside the Skirball Lobby at 7:15 p.m.) **

Week 7: Thursday, March 8

Part 1: Discuss *Gala* & Curatorial Rationale

Read: A. Lepecki, "Introduction" in *Singularities*

Read: Guest Profiles: *To Be Determined*

Part 2: ***Curator's Panel #2: Performance in Museums***

Visit from: Tim Griffin (The Kitchen) & Sozita Goudouna (Performa)

Week 8: Thursday, March 15 -- **SPRING BREAK -- NO CLASS**

Week 9: Thursday, March 22

Curator as Social Critic

In Class: Artist Archive Presentation #4

Read: A. Jones, "The Local versus the Global in Curating and Curatorial Pedagogy"

Read: A. Lepecki, "Decolonizing the Curatorial"

Read: T. Defranz, "Identifying the Endgame"

Week 10: Thursday, March 29

Curator as Institutional Critic

In Class: Artist Archive Presentation #5

Read: T.W. Adorno, "The Schema of Mass Culture" in *The Culture Industry*

Read: C. Bishop, *Radical Museology*

**** Required Performance:** Gob Squad's *War & Peace @ NYU Skirball* on March 29th **

** Time: 7:30 p.m. (meet inside the Skirball Lobby at 7:15 p.m.) **

Week 11: Thursday, April 5

Due in Class: Critical Curatorial Reflection

Part 1: Discuss *War & Peace* and Curatorial Rationale

Read: Guest Profiles: *To Be Determined*

Part 2: ***Curator's Panel #3: Alternative Models***

Visit from: AUNTS and Tal Berry (Occupy Museums)

Curator as Producer...

Week 12: Thursday, April 12

Grant Applications, Budgets, Contracts & (Alternative) Funding Strategies

In Class: Artist Archive Presentation #6

Read: selections from *Arts Management: An Entrepreneurial Approach*

Week 13: Thursday, April 19

Grant Applications, Budgets, Contracts & (Alternative) Funding Strategies

In Class: Artist Archive Presentation #7

In Class: Individual Meetings with Jay & Brandon

In Class: Group Work on Final Projects

Read: selections from *Arts Management: An Entrepreneurial Approach*

Week 14: Thursday, April 26

Grant Applications, Budgets, Contracts & (Alternative) Funding Strategies

In Class: Artist Archive Presentation #8

Read: selections from *Arts Management: An Entrepreneurial Approach*

Final Projects Due to Whole Class: Monday, April 30 by 5 p.m.

Week 15: Thursday, May 3

Proposal Presentations & Mock Deliberations

Email FAQ:

We look forward to getting to know you over the course of the semester and are 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 we check email only once each weekday afternoon. In most cases, please expect to wait 24 hours to hear back. Please be sure if you are emailing about a time sensitive issue that you leave an appropriate amount of time for a response.

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 (Garamond or Times New Roman), with 1-inch margins, double-spaced.
- The stipulated length of an assignment indicates the number of full pages we 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, we encourage you to talk to us 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.