Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Performance

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Office Hours for Spring 2015: Tuesdays, 2-4pm

Objects of every sort are materials for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies, a thousand other things that will be discovered by the new generation of artists.

-Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock”

Course Description

With its revolutionary politics, audience provocations, and enthusiastic embrace of the new, the First Futurist Manifesto of 1909 inaugurated a century of avant-garde performance. This course will investigate that century, tracing the European and American theatrical avant-gardes from 1909 to 1995, including movements and artists such as Futurism, Surrealism and Dada; John Cage, Allan Kaprow, and Happenings; utopian collectives of the 1960s; Peter Handke, Heiner Müller, the Wooster Group, and Reza Abdoh. We will explore questions including: the implications of assuming the mantle of the “avant-garde”; the contested status of the dramatic text in avant-garde performance; the relationship between performance and emerging media forms; and avant-garde artists’ efforts to create radical fusions of art and life.

Course Requirements

Participation (15%) This class will function as a seminar, and lively, thoughtful participation will be expected of each person. Participation takes many forms: sharing your thoughts and asking questions in class, paying generous attention to others’ ideas and questions, being a constructive and attentive audience member for others’ presentations and performances, and helping to set up and strike the room before and after class. You will be evaluated on the quality as well as the quantity of your participation. Frequent lateness and failure to bring the reading to class can have a negative impact on your participation grade.

Blog Posts and Comments (15%) Once during the semester, you will be a class discussion leader, which will consist in writing a blog post synthesizing and expanding on that week’s reading. Your blog post should consist of 1-2 substantial paragraphs, in which you consider elements of the reading that you found provocative and would like to
discuss further. You are encouraged to pose questions in your blog post, and you should also provide your own thoughts about these questions. In class, you will talk us through your blog post and some of the responses you received, and function as a leader in our discussion that day. This post is due by noon on the Friday before your class.

On weeks when you are not the discussion leader, you are expected to read the weekly blog post(s) and, for at least seven weeks’ worth of classes, respond to them with your own thoughts about the reading. Your responses do not need to be lengthy (a couple of sentences is fine) but they should be thoughtful. Your posts are due by 9am Monday morning.

This means you are responsible to the blog for eight weeks of the semester.

**Manifesto Analysis (20%)** A five-page close reading of a manifesto of your choice from the early twentieth-century theatrical avant-gardes. More detailed prompts will be distributed in class. You may choose to analyze one of the manifestos we have read in class or to write about one we have not read together—as long as it emerges from one of the movements we have studied—and I am happy to help you locate additional manifestos.

**Creative Project (20%)** You will make and present a creative project inspired by the subject matter of our class. This project may be a performance, but does not need to be. Prompts will be distributed in class. Your project should be accompanied by a five-page paper explaining your choices, grounding them in your research, and reflecting on the performance or presentation after you’ve completed it. You may collaborate on these projects with up to two other people (no more than three in a group, total), and the workload expectations will be adjusted to account for this (i.e. if two people collaborate on a project, the project should reflect twice as much work). If you choose to collaborate on your creative project, each collaborator should still turn in a separate paper.

**Research Paper (30%)** A 15-page research paper on a topic related to the subject of the course, to be developed in conversation with me and with your colleagues in class. You will present your abstract and research plan in class, and workshop draft material with classmates, before you turn in a final draft. Full participation in this process constitutes its own portion of your paper grade (you’ll earn 10% for process and 20% for the final paper, adding up to 30% of your total grade in the class). Your paper may take up any topic within our class’s area of exploration: it may be historical or thematic, may explore a movement, compare artists from disparate eras, or focus closely on a single artist. You must write about artist(s) working within our historical guidelines (approximately 1909-1995). I will provide a list of possible artists for exploration (from both on and off the syllabus). You may write about an artist who is not on the list with my permission, if you make a persuasive case that your subject speaks to the concerns of the class. Regardless of subject matter, your paper must make an argument that is specific and is your own, and your argument should be grounded in exploration of primary sources such as performance texts or videos. You must also make use of at least two critical sources, which cannot be web sites.
Books and Readings
Because we are studying such a diverse group of artists, there are only two books that I am asking you to purchase for this class. Both are available at the Bard Bookstore (or inexpensively online). Please buy both at the beginning of the semester, as the Wooster Group book won’t be needed until late in the semester, after the bookstore normally returns unpurchased books.


All other readings will be provided as PDFs and photocopies, posted to ReservesDirect. I expect that you will bring paper copies of all readings to class, and for this reason, I will occasionally provide photocopies but will most often expect you to print the materials out on your own. I will also leave a copy of the course readings, updated week by week, “on reserve” at the front desk of the Fisher Center, and you may stop by to borrow them or make photocopies as you need.

Schedule of Readings and Projects (subject to change—stay tuned!)

Unless otherwise noted, all readings are available online and from the course packet in the Fisher Center.

**Week One, January 26: Introductions/The Communist Manifesto and Ubu Roi**

**Week Two, February 2: Futurism (CANCELLED)**
Reading: Marinetti and collaborators, “First Futurist Manifesto”, selected syntesi;
Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Mystery-Bouffe*

**Week Three, February 9: Futurism, take 2!**
Reading: Marinetti and collaborators, “First Futurist Manifesto”, selected syntesi;
Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Mystery-Bouffe*

**Week Four, February 16: Expressionism, Dada, and Surrealism Part I**
Oskar Kokoschka, “Murderer Hope of Womankind”; Tristan Tzara, “Dada Manifesto”; “A Visit to the Cabaret Dada”; André Breton, “First Surrealist Manifesto”; Guillaume Apollinaire, “The Breasts of Tiresias”

**Performance:** Friday, February 20, and Saturday, February 21, Cynthia Hopkins, *A Living Documentary* (see fishercenter.bard.edu for more information)

**Week Five, February 23: Artaud, Surrealism Part II, and Brecht**
Masterpieces,” “The Theater and Cruelty”; Artaud, *Spurt of Blood* (ReservesDirect); Brecht, *The Measures Taken, The Exception and the Rule*

**Week Six, March 2: Black Mountain College and Happenings**
Optional Draft Deadline for Manifesto Analysis

**Week Seven, March 9: Greenwich Village 1963**
Manifesto Analysis Due

Carolee Schneeman Lecture, Thursday, March 12, 6-8pm, Weis Cinema

March 16: No class (Spring Break)

**Week Eight, March 23: The Black Arts Movement**
Creative Projects

**Week Nine, March 30: The Performance Group/The Living Theatre Part I**
Reading/viewing: “Six Axioms for Environmental Theater”, *Dionysus in 69, The Brig*
Creative Projects

**Special Screening, Tuesday, March 31, 7-9pm: Russian Futurism Redux**

**Week Ten, April 6: Situationism, The Living Theatre Part II, May 1968**
Reading/viewing: Guy Debord, excerpts from *Society of the Spectacle*; Martin Puchner, excerpt from *Poetry of the Revolution*; Living Theatre, video excerpts of *Paradise Now*
Special Guest: Professor Kate Bredeson (via Skype) on performance and protest in May ’68
Creative Projects

**Sunday, April 12: Special Screening: Richard Foreman**

**Week Eleven, April 13: Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman**
Creative Projects

**Week Twelve, April 20: Heiner Müller, Peter Handke**
Heiner Müller, *Hamletmachine*, *Mauser*, *Despoiled Shore Medea-material Landscape with Argonauts*; Peter Handke, *Kaspar*  

**Abstracts and Research Plans Due**  

**Creative Projects**

**Week Thirteen, April 27:** Advising Day (no class)

**Sunday, May 3:** Special Screening: *Rumstick Road*

**Week Fourteen, May 4:** The Wooster Group  

**Creative Projects**

**Week Fifteen, May 11:** Reza Abdoh and the “Death of the Avant-Garde”  
Reading: TBA; stay tuned!

**Creative Projects**  

**Final Essay Due**

**Class Policies**

**Attendance Policy**  
Perfect attendance is a basic expectation of this class. One absence, any time during the semester, will be excused with no questions asked; if you are not feeling well, if you must attend a family event, a field trip for another class, etc., that’s what this free day is for. After that, each absence not accompanied by a doctor’s note or not necessary for a religious holiday or family emergency will be considered unexcused, and after two unexcused absences, your grade will be lowered by one-third letter grade (an A goes to an A-; an A- to a B+, etc). Four or more unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the course.

**Reading**  
You will always be expected to have the reading with you in class.

**Devices**  
No phones, tablets, or laptops in class, please.

**Citation and Academic Honesty**  
Citing your sources is an essential aspect of college-level writing. This is not only a means of demonstrating your academic honesty—it’s also how you make an argument persuasive to a reader, by showing clearly which ideas come from your sources and which are your own.

In your research papers, you will be expected to cite your sources correctly according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*. (If you prefer the *MLA Handbook*, that’s fine too—the most
important thing is to be consistent.) I am expecting that you are familiar with the fundamentals of citation methods, but if you are not, take a look at the *Chicago Manual of Style* (or its online Quick Guide), or come to see me or visit the Writing Center. We will take a moment in class to look at how to cite possibly-unfamiliar sources such as live performance and performance on video.

I also expect that you will use sources transparently in your blog posts and in the papers that accompany your creative projects. When citing from our own reading materials or viewing materials, you do not need to include a full citation, just a page number if relevant. If you are including ideas from other sources, you must include a full citation.

As you may know, failing to properly cite your sources—and any other method of presenting another person’s work as your work—is plagiarism. Among other things, plagiarism includes turning in someone else’s work as yours; it includes rephrasing your sources’ ideas without attribution; and it includes reproducing your sources’ exact phrases without placing them in quotation marks and adding a citation. Plagiarism has serious consequences at Bard, including expulsion. Read Bard’s statement on plagiarism here: [http://inside.bard.edu/dosa/handbook/index.php?aid=1201&sid=705](http://inside.bard.edu/dosa/handbook/index.php?aid=1201&sid=705)

If you are ever unsure about questions of proper citation or academic honesty, stop by my office hours and ask! It is much better to ask than to inadvertently plagiarize.

**Late Papers and Extensions**
I do not grant extensions except in cases of extreme extenuating circumstances. Late papers are docked one-third of a grade for every twenty-four hours they are late (after twenty-four hours, an A becomes an A-, an A- becomes a B+, etc.). Late blog posts and comments can earn only partial credit; there is no guarantee that we will be able to reschedule late performance projects.

**Communication**
My door is open to you, and I look forward to getting to know you! A few notes that will help our communications:

*It is always easier to discuss ideas in person than over email. When you can, please stop by my office hours or schedule an appointment with me to discuss your thoughts and questions.

*When you email me with questions, please allow 24 hours for a response.

*I am always happy to make arrangements for students who need accommodations. If you need an accommodation, please contact Amy Shein at the beginning of the semester, and please provide an accommodation letter to me at least two weeks before the relevant due date.

*Your success in this class is important to me. If you are having difficulty with the course materials or if something is preventing you from staying up to date with readings or
projects, please come and speak to me about it before the project is due! It is much easier to solve problems together when I know about the situation in advance.

**Grading Rubric**

All analytical written assignments will be graded on the following scale:

**A**: Exceptional work that goes above and beyond the requirements of the assignment. Reflects a depth and range of thinking and study that are clearly outstanding. Thorough research (if applicable), concise argument, and clarity of style (both written and verbal) characterize work in this range.

**B**: Above average completion of the assignment. This grade reflects solid work in research, argument, and style, but may be marred by slight errors of fact, ambiguities in the argument, or grammatical errors. To earn a grade of B or higher, you must go beyond the stated requirements of the assignment.

**C**: Satisfactory completion of the assignment. This grade represents the minimum effort needed to complete the assignment. Research is barely adequate, arguments are made, but not fully supported or are not very insightful. This grade represents average, which by definition means most people most of the time.

**D**: Does not fulfill all of the expectations of the assignment. Characterized by significant gaps in research, argumentation, and a below-standard writing style, marred by frequent grammatical errors and lack of organization.

**F**: Does not fulfill any of the expectations of the assignment. Little or no research or argumentation, no evidence or support for argumentation, and an unacceptable level of writing.