

Introduction to Theatre: An Art of Creative Synthesis and New Technology

Department of Theatre and Performance Studies
THET 107 (Humanities Core)

Course Information:
Tues & Thurs: 1-2:30pm
Room: Dance Theatre

Instructor: Nadja Masura
Office: CSPAC 2824
Office hours: 3-4:00pm Tues, Thurs
Email: nmasura@umd.edu (subj:Thet107)

TA1 ta1@umd.edu

TA2 ta2@umd.edu

“Knowledge of the technical makes the creative possible.” -Joseph Svoboda¹

What is performance, what is technology, and how are they one and the same? Theatre is an art form composed of various creative elements such as art, music, movement, and language; it is also a testing ground for new technologies for communication. Since the earliest times, theatre has been a forum for communicating ideas between performers and an audience. It is an art form which combines into one, the many human modes of expression (often through the use of new ideas, tools and technologies). This course will look at theatre as a form of synthesis of artistic mediums. As a class we will collectively explore theatre’s relationship to developing technology, while allowing students to discover their own theatrical ideals and skills.

Students will gain a new appreciation of theatre as a sum of many parts. The first half of the class will focus on each of five major elements of theatre (music, sound and dance; text and story; visual setting, actors and puppets; light and film, and audience) in relation to major technical and theatrical innovations throughout history. The second half of the class will give students insight into how these different mediums have been combined, or synthesized, together by major theatre artists. Through first examining the innovations made within each of the artistic elements (using chronological examples), then exploring ways in which they were blended, students will begin to see patterns, artistic biases, and develop their own aesthetic ideals.

This broad, creative and often hands-on view of theatre performance will cover such topics as: mechanical puppetry from the days of ancient Greece to computer avatars, visual settings from Italian Renaissance scene design and the details of Realism to Virtual Reality. Because technology can be considered as the passage of information as well as mechanical hardware, major ideas shaping the actor’s art, movement, and the creation of text (Gutenberg press to online scripts) will be briefly covered. Students will gain a

¹ Burian, Jarka. *The Scenography of Josef Svoboda*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1971, 22.

general understanding of how major schools of theatrical thought shape these elements into production, as well as shaping a concept of their own ideal communications art form.

Course Objectives/Goals

Students will:

1. Gain an appreciation for the separate elements of theatre including movement/dance, visual art (set), lighting, music, writing, and acting as they are complemented or facilitated through developing technologies from ancient times to the present.
2. Understand how past directors have blended these elements (and new technologies) together to create a production style, sometimes emphasizing one over another.
3. Gain perspective on the use of new technologies in creating theatre and performance communications, and begin to identify their own skills/interests and envision possible ideas for future theatre.

Required Texts:

- Barranger, Milly, *Theatre: A Way of Seeing*
- Course Packet
- Online resources listed in course packet
- Students are required to see one on campus theatre department production and one off campus new technology performance (which they may find online as well as live). (Students may choose a bare-boards or mainstream production off site, if the department or center is featuring a media rich production.) *Ticket prices vary.*
- Students are expected to supply their own creative materials for drawing, painting, collage, or other means they choose for their creative synthesis project.

Projects and Exams

Exams: (25 pts each) There will be two exams, a midterm (March 14) and a final exam (week of May 16), which will focus on testing student's recognition, memory and understanding of the course material.

Essays: (25 pts each) In addition there will be **two essays** (5-6 page, single spaced, 12pt font, 1.5" margins). These papers will allow the student to show their comprehension and synthesis of the ideas presented in class. The first essay (due March 30) will cover the student's further research into one of the areas/elements or major area of technology covered in class. The second essay, occurring later in the semester (due April 27), will be an analysis of the methods of synthesis or production covered in lecture and will allow students to develop their own individual (as opposed to the group project) ideas of how technology and synthesis could work. Essay instructions will be given out two weeks before they are due in class.

Reading Responses: (5 pts each total 50) Homework (due each Thursday) will consist of weekly responses to reading prompts which may include visual as well as written exercises. Within these the student will be expected to respond by briefly writing (1-2 pgs), creating visual, tactile or performance responses to the ideas and performances they

in counter in and out of class. Each week a new set of questions will be passed out and students are expected to try one of each of the types of answers by the end of the semester.

Synthesis project: (25 pts) Students may work together in groups of 3 to 5 individuals (*consisting of at least one performer, one major coordinator or writer/event framer, and one craftsperson –visual artist (set/animation), musician, technician etc*). Students conceptualize their ideal form of theatre and demonstrate in presentation and short performance this idea using one of the five plays read in class. In this project they students will learn the value of working together in collaborative teams in which each member contributes the creative element they are best suited for (acting, directing, writing, visual graphics/set, audio, etc.) to put forward possible examples for future performance styles. The project will have a written component which discusses the desired effects and technology in relation to the actual partial past inspirations. The project allows students to partially embody, or make initial steps toward, their ideal type of future production. Students will be graded on both the written and performed aspects of their project.

A class session early in the semester will be devoted to finding group members with like ideals and necessary talents/interests, and students are expected to work both inside and outside of class.

Attendance and Participation Grade (25pts.) Students must come to class, sign in on the attendance sheet and participate in all demonstrations and in class exercises. Students should come to class with the reading for the week done on Tuesdays and Reading Responses ready to be turned in on Thursdays. Attendance and participation will be partially determined by in class written learning exercises (quizzes). The policy on attitude to participate and willingness to learn listed under policies will be strictly adhered to. Students missing classes (without properly authorized notes) will not receive points for that day.

Grading Procedure:

Grades are based on points accumulated through homework, essays, exams, project, and in class participation.

10 reading responses 5 pts each = 50
2 exams at 25 pts each = 50
2 essays at 25 pts each = 50
group project = 25
participation = 25

total = 200 pts

A=90% and higher, B=80% +, C=70% +, D=60% +, F=50%

Class Schedule:

Additional readings or URLs will be given out at the end of each week or posted on Web CT.

First Day: January 26, Introduction to Terms and Concepts: Theatre, Synthesis, Technology (Theatre and Technology from Thespis to Virtual Reality)

Week One: Jan. 31, Feb. 2, Creative Elements of Theatre: Music, Sound & Dance

Tuesday: *Reading pages 1-24 in text, course packet: (Nagler 3-10).*

Thursday: Reading Response Due

Week Two: Feb. 7 & 9, Creative Elements of Theatre: Text and Story

Tuesday: *Reading pages 27-40 and 157-166 in the book, Play #1: Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

Thursday: Reading Response Due

Week Three: Feb 14 & 16, Creative Elements of Theatre: Visual (Place and Setting)

Tuesday: *Reading pages 41-55 and 167-187 in text, course packet: (DeLahunta, "Virtual Reality and Performance." 105-114, Nagler, 579-589, Brockett and Hildy, 400-402), Play #2: Chekhov, The Cherry Orchard.*

Thursday: Reading Response Due

Week Four: Feb. 21 & 23, Creative Elements of Theatre: Actors, Puppets, and Avatars

Tuesday: *Reading pages 55-72, in text, course packet: (Reaney, "Virtual Characters in Theatre Production: Actors and Avatars," Lahanas, "Heron of Alexandria," Craig, "The Actor and the Uber-Marionette," 159-166), Play #3: Gotanda, Ballad of Yachiyo.*

Thursday: Reading Response Due

Week Five: Feb. 28 & Mar. 2, Creative Elements of Theatre: Spectacle of Lights, Film, and Motion

Tuesday: *Reading pages 73-127 in text, course packet: (Neale, Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Colour, 7-28, Causey "The Screen Test of the Double: The Uncanny Performer in the Space of Technology," 383-394), Play #4: Beckett, Waiting for Godot.*

Thursday: Reading Response Due

Week Six: Mar. 7 & 9, Creative Elements of Theatre: Audience and Control/ Interactivity

Tuesday: *Reading pages 189-211 in text, course packet: (Schechner, Environmental Theater, xix-xlv), Play #5: Brecht, Life of Galileo.*

Thursday: Reading Response Due

Week Seven: Mar. 14 & 16, Synthesis 1: Theatre Roles

Tuesday: **Midterm Exam**

Thursday: *Reading pages 129-155 in the book*

Assemble into groups

Week of March 21 & 23

Spring Break

Week Eight: Mar. 28 & 30, Synthesis 2: Musical/Dance Theatre (composers and choreographers: Wagner and other Opera, Merce Cunningham and Aliennation, Broadway musicals, Futurist sound dramas, Laurie Anderson)

Tuesday: *Reading pages 287-309 in text, course packet: (Birringer, "Dance and Media Technologies," 84-93, Wagner, "The Art-Work of the Future," in Dukore, 777-794, Kirby, Futurist Performance, 3-18). (exams back)*

Thursday: Reading Response Due, **Paper 1 due**

Week Nine: Apr. 4 & 6, Synthesis 3: Literary Theatre (the age of actor/managers, script driven theatre, Moscow Art Theatre, the power of the director, Brecht, Peter Brook)

Tuesday: *Reading pages 213-222 in text, course packet: (Brecht, "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre," from Dukore 847-854).*

Thursday: Reading Response Due

Week Ten: Apr. 11 & 13, Synthesis 4: Visual Theatre (Spectacle Driven Theatre, Bauhaus, Piscator, Artaud, Robert Wilson, installations/happenings/performance art)

Tuesday: *Reading pages 237-261 in text, course packet: (Willett, The Theatre of Erwin Piscator, 107-126, Brockett and Hildy, 550-551 [on Robert Wilson], Artaud, "No More Masterpieces" in Dukore, 760-766).*

Thursday: Reading Response Due

Week Eleven: Apr 18 & 20, Synthesis 5: Collaborate Theatre (Cycle Plays, Poor Theatre, confrontational Futurist theatre, Living Theatre, Open Theatre, Environmental Theatre, audience participation, online collaboration)

Tuesday: *Reading pages 263-285 in text, course packet: (Schechner, Environmental Theater, 40-86, Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre, 15-53, Kirby, Futurist Performance, 179-186, and 196-202).*

Thursday: Reading Response Due

Week Twelve: Apr 25 & 27, Updates on New Media Theatre/Virtual Performance (George Coates, *Tempest 2000* (GA), AlienNation, GSRT, Studio Z, Kansas)

Tuesday: *Reading pages 311-349, course packet: (Saltz, "Live Media: Interactive Technology and Theatre," 107-130, Reaney, "The Theatre of Virtual Reality," 29-32).*

Thursday: **Paper 2 due**

Week Thirteen: May 2 & 4 Group Projects

Tuesday: **presentations**

Thursday: **presentations**

Week Fourteen: May 9 & 11 Group Projects

Tuesday: **presentations**

Thursday: **presentations**

Week of May 16 & 18: **(Final Exam)**

Policies: Attendance, Participation/Attitude, Preparation, and Prerequisites

Students signing up for this class should be able to write at a college sophomore level (and should have taken one previous writing seminar). Much of the work in the class will be related to assimilation and reflection on the presented and student researched material. Poor writing skills can impede your ability to communicate and get the grade you deserve.

Likewise students should give their best effort on any visual or performance work, poor or mediocre effort will be reflected in your grade. This course encourages students to identify their strengths and weakness and find new ways of expressing themselves in various mediums. Students are encouraged to find creative solutions such as using computer drafting or collage to compensate for poor drawing skills. All students should have access to a computer and be able to use the internet.

This class is built on an understanding of mutual respect between teacher and student, between students, and between student and the material. Previous theatrical experience or skill is not need to participate, only a willingness to learn and invest yourself in the class process. Only students willing to give 100% of their energy, intellect, and enthusiasm to the exploration of technology and theatre should register. Students are expected to come to class fully prepared with reading and work in hand. Approximately one to two thirds of each class will be spent as a lab requiring student participation. Students who come unprepared or who refuse to participate in any class movement, staging or other practical exercises/demonstrations or discussions with the appropriate attitude of willingness will be asked to leave and loose credit for participation for that day. Attendance is mandatory and will affect your grade.

This course conforms to school policies found at www.shc.umd.edu/code.html on matters of gender/sexual preference, racial, and religious tolerance and equity as well as issues of disability and scholastic honesty.