

Course Syllabus



Course	THEA 3323
Course Title	Performance in Historical Context
Professor	Dr. Maiza Hixson (Ph.D., M.F.A., M.A.) (she/her/hers)
Term	Spring 2025
Meetings	MW 10:00-11:15 am, JO 2.604

Email Address: Maiza.Hixson@utdallas.edu (I will reply within 24 hours, M-F)

Office Hours: 11:30 am-12:30 pm, Mondays in person or on Teams; please notify me in advance that you wish to meet

Office Location: Erik Jonsson Academic Center JO 5.203, 5th Floor

Course Description: Study of major playwrights, directors, collaborative and solo performance artists, and other artists working in the contemporary arts. Contemporary theatre refers to artworks and performances created and performed from the mid-twentieth century to the present day. It encompasses a broad range of styles, themes, and innovations that reflect modern and current societal, political, cultural, and technological issues. Accordingly, this transdisciplinary undergraduate course explores significant experimental theater, artists' cinema, new media, performance art, and other stagings from the mid-twentieth to the twenty-first century. From the traditional black box theatre to the white cube art gallery, from city streets to the digital stage, we will focus on multi-racial, multi-ethnic, queer, trans, BIPOC artists, playwrights, directors, solo performance artists, and others working in the local, national, and global context.

We will study a range of artistic and theatrical genres and creative practices, including post-dramatic theater, immersive and verbatim theater, and site-specific performance art. Assignments will include attending live performances, watching online documentation of productions, reading and discussing plays and scholarly criticism, performing solo and group projects, and writing exercises that enable us to *come to terms with works of art*. That is, we will learn how to experience what artists do through sensory, emotional, personal, historical, and critical engagements with the artistic material. This course also challenges us to think through such questions as: What constitutes a theater and stage? What different types of performances take place on physical, digital, augmented, and/or city stages? Can there be theater without a script? When does a performance begin? When the curtain opens? When you enter the theater or art gallery? Who are the actors and what is the role of the audience? Considering our own subjectivities and lived experiences in relation to the course content, we will think through these questions together to advance contemporary ideas and understandings of dramatic texts, theater, and performance art. (3 semester credit hours) May be repeated for credit as topics vary (9 semester credit hours maximum). Prerequisite: THEA 1310 or instructor consent required.

Course Breakdown:

Class Participation: Attendance, Readings, Lectures, Performances, Critiques, and Viewings: 20%

Weekly Writing Assignments: 10% Write a reflection on the instructor's prompt for that week's play/performance.

On-Campus Attendance of Live Performance: 10% *Karen Springs*, UTD University Theatre

Off-Campus Trip to View Live Performance: 10% Performance TBD (To Be Announced)

Midterm Performance Lecture: 10% Individual presentation on contemporary theatre or artist of your choice.

Site-Specific Performance: 10% To Be Discussed in Class

Final Group Performance: 20% Rehearsals & Production

Final Exam: 10% Comprehensive multiple choice and essay exam

Course Goals/Outcomes:

This course emphasizes preparatory processes that enable students to learn about, create, and critique contemporary works of performance, art, and/or theater. Course projects of increased ambition and scope will require planning, effective time management, and sustained focus and concentration. Students will develop well-researched and self-managed projects.

During the course, students will develop the following:

- Knowledge of historical precedents of contemporary art and theatre
- Further acquisition of contemporary art and theatre languages and critical thinking skills
- Ability to analyze works of art through discussion and critique

- Further development of individual and group artistic practice through readings, discussion, and projects
- Integration of course content, vocabulary, process, material, and form

Major Learning Objectives/Competencies:

- Apply historical research of contemporary art and theatre to critical awareness and creative practice
- Synthesize research/content/material/form
- Engage with unfamiliar concepts responsibly and openly
- Manage projects over extended periods and durations
- Develop critical thinking and research skills

Assessment:

Students are assessed by the evaluation of course/project outcomes, which reveal a grasp of critical concepts as well as the development and acquisition of historical knowledge and skills. In addition, student participation in class during work sessions, instructor's lectures, discussions, visiting artist lectures, and critiques are important factors in assessment. Preparedness and effective time management are essential and as such reveal the depth of student engagement and involvement in course work.

Formal assessment involves:

- Active participation in class discussion
- Class critiques at the conclusion of each project
- Individual and group critiques during creative/studio work sessions
- Mid-quarter review
- Final critique

Grading

Final grading will be based upon the timely completion of projects, participation in class, as well as my assessment of the student's critical understanding of course contents. Students are expected to complete all assignments on time and be prepared for class with the appropriate tools and materials.

A = Excellent – firm grasp of concepts – energetic attitude of engagement with all aspects of course work, full attendance

B = Good – grasp of concepts – active engagement with all aspects of course work, missed course

C = Average – moderate engagement with all aspects of course work, missed courses

D = Passing but below average – insufficient grasp of concepts – disengagement with certain aspects of course work, missed courses

F = Failing grade – no grasp of concepts – disengagement from all aspects of course work, missed courses

Absences

Attendance and punctuality are expected. Because the instructor's presentations will take place at the beginning of class, punctuality is very important. Being late can be functionally equivalent to missing that day of class. **Two or more absences will compromise your standing in the class and could result in a grade reduction.** Consideration will be given to extraordinary circumstances that may result in an exception to policy. If students are absent on the day of a project submission, the instructor should be contacted, and the work submitted no later than the following scheduled class. If a student misses a class, that student is responsible for turning in the work during the next session.

Please note the following:

- **No use of screens of any kind unless assigned for course projects**
- **Trigger Warning and Disclaimer**

This course explores artistic and theatrical works that may include challenging, provocative, or potentially distressing themes, including but not limited to: violence, discrimination, trauma, sexuality, and death. These topics are integral to the historical, cultural, and creative context of the works studied and are presented to foster critical thinking, artistic appreciation, and meaningful discussion. While every effort will be made to approach these materials with sensitivity,

students should be aware that engagement with such content may evoke strong emotional responses. Participation in class activities, discussions, and assignments is expected and will contribute to your growth as an artist and thinker.

Disclaimer: By enrolling in this course, students acknowledge that exposure to sensitive content is part of the educational experience. Students are encouraged to seek support from campus resources (e.g., counseling services) if needed and to communicate any concerns in advance so appropriate accommodations can be discussed. If you feel that specific content may present significant challenges, please notify the professor privately to discuss potential strategies for navigating the material.

Course Schedule is Tentative and Subject to Change

Course Runs January 21-May 9, 2025

University Closings Martin Luther King DayMonday, January 20

No Classes: Spring breakMonday, March 17 – Sunday, March 23

Week 1

Jan 21-24

Welcome to the course! Discussion of Contemporary Performance: Art and Theatre Histories, Syllabus, Course Breakdown and Expectations

Lecture & Discussion: Mid-Twentieth Century Experimental Theatre: 1950-1970: Artists: The Living Theatre, Open Theatre, Bread and Puppet Theatre, San Francisco Mime Troupe, Performance Group, La MaMa Experimental Theater, Café Cino, Theatre of the Absurd. **Black Arts Movement:** Amiri Baraka, Ntozake Shange. **Ideas:** Breaking the Fourth Wall: Audience interaction and participation. Non-traditional Spaces: Use of streets, prisons, and other unconventional venues. Political and Social Activism: Theatre as a tool for resistance and change.

Assigned Readings and Viewings

Week 2

Jan 27-31

Lecture & Discussion: Performance Artists: 1950s-1970s: Artists: John Cage, Yoko Ono, Joseph Beuys, Marina Abramović, Allan Kaprow, Carolee Schneemann; Judson Dance Theater. **Ideas:** groundbreaking artists, musicians, and dancers who blurred the lines between dance, theater, and performance art.

Assigned Readings and Viewings

Week 3

Feb 3-7

Lecture & Discussion: Theatre and Performance: 1970-1990. Artists: Lorraine O'Grady, Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Robert Wilson, et al. **Ideas:** Multimedia and Technology work of Robert Wilson, *Einstein on the Beach*. Peter Brook's rituals; Jerzy Grotowski's "Poor theatre." The late Richard Foreman's: Ontological-Hysterical Theater.

Assigned Readings and Viewings

Week 4

Feb 10-14

Lecture & Discussion: Theater and Performance: 1980s-early 2000s. Artists: The Wooster Group: Elizabeth LeCompte, Laurie Anderson, Spalding Grey *Swimming to Cambodia* and other monologues. **Ideas:** Nonlinear Narratives: Innovative storytelling techniques, metafictional elements; Social and Political Themes: Plays addressing race, gender, sexuality, class, and the impact of political events; dark comedy: The rise of humor blended with tragedy and provocative themes. Intertextuality in contemporary art and theatre.

Assigned Readings and Viewings

Week 5:

Feb 17-21

Mandatory Attendance: *Karen Springs*, UTD Theatre, Feb 20-March 1

Lecture & Discussion: *Karen Springs*, a contemporary interdisciplinary adaptation of a modern theatre classic, *An Enemy of the People*, by Henrik Ibsen. We will visit the set of the play and engage with actors and technicians making the production come to life. **Ideas:** Contemporary, experimental, new media, feminist adaptation of a modern classic nineteenth-century realist play.

Assigned Readings and Viewings

Week 6:

Feb 24-28

Midterm Project Introduction & Discussion: Solo Performance Lecture: 10% A well-researched, informative, and well-rehearsed performative (solo) presentation on an emerging or established contemporary artist of your choice. Instructor must approve choice of artist in advance. Time will be allotted for research and rehearsal during class.

Week 7:

March 3-7

Lecture: Early Online Performance Cultures of the 2000s; **Ideas:** YouTube, Video Games, Fandom, Late Capitalism; **Artists:** Ryan Treccartin, *I-Be Area*, 2007, Yes Men, Cory Arcangel *Super Mario Clouds*, 2002, Jenny Drumgoole, Shana Moulton, *Whispering Pines*. **Watch:** *Real Women of Philadelphia*

<https://jennydrumgoole.com/recipe-videos/>

Wing Bowl 2006, <https://youtu.be/ogPkyfTZTK8?si=g8LIrU1vQ3709ZJy>

Make and Do Zoom School, 2020, <https://youtu.be/ioMYxLv9-V8?si=GM6XgufjN8b4Mx8V>

Watch: *Whispering Pines* (2001-present) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Z1kow40WGY>

Watch: Interview with Shana Moulton <https://youtu.be/MfSXREBgmSs?si=oiBLWFO8wwcIs9vD>

Read: (Review) "Shana Moulton: Galerie Crevecoeur" by Mara Hoberman, *Artforum International*

Read: Jonathan Wallis, "Jenny Drumgoole: The Marketing Frame: Online Corporate Communities and Artistic Intervention"

Week 8:

March 10-14

Midterm Performance Lecture Projects Due in Class

Week 9:

March 17-21 NO CLASS

Week 10:

March 24-28

Lecture: Post-Dramatic Theater 2010-2015; **Artists:** Nature Theatre of Oklahoma, Directed by Pavol Liska and Kelly Copper; **Ideas:** No Plays, Just Playing; **Watch:** *Theater of Chance* (2014), <https://vimeo.com/89189860>

Watch: *Life and Times* (2009), <https://www.wnyc.org/story/272481-adventures-in-um-ah-autobiography-nature-theater-of-oklahomas-life-and-times/>; **Read:** (excerpts) *The Life and Work of Nature Theater of Oklahoma*, Edited by Malzacher Florian, 2019; **Read:** Philip Auslander, "Digital Liveness: A Historico-Philosophical Perspective," *Performing Arts Journal*, 2012

Week 11:

March 31-April 4

Discussion of Final Project: Group Performance.

Field Trip to View Live Performance in Dallas, TBA

Week 12:

April 7-11

Lecture: Show Me The Bodies: Contemporary Movements and Site-Specific Spatial Choreographies: 2000s

Artists: Tino Sehgal, Florence Peake, EJ Hill, Maria Hassabi, Geumhyung Jeong, et al.

Watch: <https://africanah.org/e-j-hill/>; <https://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/2018/made-in-la-2018/ej-hill>

https://youtu.be/y7U_faIRo_g?si=IGDXbGokFt74JTpY

Wall Licking: https://www.instagram.com/iheartbeuys/p/C0s9U7pr01O/?img_index=4

Week 13:

April 14-18

Lecture: Metafictional Broadway, Musical Theater & Queer Dramaturgies; **Artist:** Michael R. Jackson. **Listen:** *A Strange Loop*, 2019, by Michael R. Jackson. Usher is a Black, queer writer, working a day job he hates while writing

his original musical: a piece about a Black, queer writer, working a day job he hates while writing his original musical. **Watch:** Panel with Michael R. Jackson at Guggenheim Museum
https://youtu.be/D_2YEP_fLlw?si=Tgul3iCfBTFWLkhf; **Watch:** A Strange Loop: NPR Tiny Desk Concert, 2022
https://youtu.be/ObD7Qjai55Y?si=QbeDG7A_RsdZ9w2R; **Read:** Sarah K. Whitfield, “Disrupting Heteronormative Temporality through Queer Dramaturgies: *Fun Home*, *Hadestown* and *A Strange Loop*”

Week 14:

April 21-25

Mandatory Final Performance Rehearsals in Class

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Week 15:

April 28-May 2

Final Performances Due

Final Exam: Comprehensive multiple choice and essay exam covering the semester’s material.