

# TH261

## Digital Theaters

**Course time: Tue 18:30-21:45**

**Seminar Leaders: Nina Tecklenburg + Ramona Mosse**

**Email: [n.tecklenburg@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:n.tecklenburg@berlin.bard.edu), [r.mosse@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:r.mosse@berlin.bard.edu)**

**Office Hours: Tue 10-12am (Tecklenburg) and Tue 2-3:30pm (Mosse) or by appointment**

**Module: Media, Practice, Techniques / Exhibition Culture and Public Space**

This is an OSUN Network Collaborative Course taught in partnership courses on Digital Theaters offered at the following partner institutions: Bard College Annandale; Birkbeck, University of London; Central European University, Budapest/Vienna; Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá; Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg.

### Course Description

What happens when theaters go digital? This course addresses how theater and performance as live embodied practices and forms of communal encounter have permanently changed due to extended lockdowns, social distancing, and pandemic health restrictions. Together we want to investigate the new dispersed digital formats - WhatsApp and Instagram performances, VR/AR-experiences, Zoom theaters - that have expanded our idea of theater. But how do these new networked performance experiences alter common social and cultural functions of theater?

Using case studies from the five exemplary locations of Berlin, Vienna/Budapest, London, Johannesburg, Annandale/New York City, and Bogotá, *Digital Theaters* aims to study how the performing arts have fundamentally altered their reach, audience, institutional structures, and the quality of social encounter by going digital and what that suggests about the future make-up of the performing arts sector. As an OSUN collaborative network course, this seminar highlights the fact that questions about the shifting ethics and aesthetics of cultural production need to be discussed in a global civic context which mirrors how we currently come together: physically distanced but virtually connected.

We will pursue these issues through a mix of theory and practice, combining readings, discussions with practical projects that allow students to try out the tools of digital theater making. We also invite theater makers and curators to give workshops as part of the seminar about how they have in practical terms addressed the effects of social distancing and developed alternative bridges of interconnection. Students will be asked to collaborate across campuses to actively document the current cultural moment and reflect the enhanced role of digital media. In doing so, they will participate in our semester-long project

of creating a living archive of digital theater, consisting of video documentations, audio interviews, hybrid performances, and interactive collages.

## **Learning objectives**

*Digital Theaters* aims:

1. to study how the performing arts in the six exemplary locations have fundamentally altered their reach, audience, institutions, quality of social encounter, and political moment in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. to enable students to collaborate across the different political and cultural contexts that the lively exchange with the partner campuses affords.
3. to expand students' practical skills in digital literacy as they artistically document the current cultural moment and enhanced role of digital media.
4. to allow students to critically engage with the role of digital media in shaping our individual and social sense of reality.
5. to investigate the new work processes and creative and institutional infrastructures of contemporary performing arts production during the pandemic.
6. to practically experiment with (post)pandemic performance approaches whilst interweaving discursive, embodied and digital tools for the creation of a living archive.

## **Requirements**

Students are expected to:

- Turn off phones during class time.
- Initiate appointments with the Professor or arts staff outside of class time.
- Always allocate extra time for work preparation and clean-up for independent production.
- Respond to emails from their professors in a timely manner.
- Inform their professors at the beginning of the semester if photos of student's identity, artwork, works in progress are NOT to be taken and / or used for Bard College Berlin.
- Remove all artworks, art materials, and / or any personal belongings before the end of the semester. Failure to remove works or return spaces clean and empty may result in final grade penalization. Donating unrequested artworks and / or art materials is not permitted and will still be considered student property, expected to be removed by your inspection deadline. Please contact Studio Arts Manager Joon Park for more information: [j.park@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:j.park@berlin.bard.edu)

### Attendance

- Attendance of all classes is expected. To account for minor circumstances, one absence (that is, absence from **one three-hour session**) will not affect the participation grade or require documentation.
- Tardiness after ten minutes will be considered an absence.
- A student who has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused, risks not receiving credit for the course. The full Bard College/ Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.
- SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2022: Some students may need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

### Policy on Late Submission of Artworks / Presentations

- Assignments (artworks, essays, performances, presentations) that are up to 24 hours late will risk being downgraded one full grade (Example: B+ becomes C+). The Professors are not obliged to accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late. Where a Professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.
- Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with the professor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

### **Assessment**

**Critical thinking, creative work, collaboration:** This course aims for an experimental pedagogy and a close interweaving of theory and creative methods. Students will be assessed on their ability and willingness to fruitfully combine critical thinking and artistic practice. Furthermore, this course fosters artistic and intellectual collaboration amongst students across campuses and cultural contexts. Working together independently and taking over responsibility for each other is a crucial part of this course. This also includes logistical issues such as organizing technical equipment and rehearsal times across different time zones.

**Participation and preparation:** Please complete the required homework (readings, presentations, viewings, assignments) and contribute creatively and meaningfully to the exercises and discussions in

class. You will receive a participation grade which is based on your in-class engagement, completion of homework and collaboration. Please reserve 4 hours on average for weekly class preparation and asynchronous class work. Readings will be made available through Brightspace.

## **Hybrid Seminar Format**

This course will run as a hybrid seminar between all participating campuses. We will meet in person on campus and reserve a part of our class time for synchronous zoom meetings with students from other participating campuses. We will be using the following online platforms and tools to create different meeting spaces for virtual interaction.

- **Brightspace** as a common resource platform for the seminar, which will gather all information regarding the schedule, any updates to the seminar schedule as well as links to the guest talks and film screenings. Most of the readings and links will be stored here in pdf format (unless a link is provided in the syllabus) and there is the option to post additional materials that emerge from our classroom interaction.
- **Padlet** as a posting platform that allows us to engage in asynchronous discussions, upload of smaller presentations and virtual collaborations. If you have not used Padlet yet, imagine it as an online notice board to which you can post text, visual, and audio files as well as comment and interact with your peers at BCB and across the network.

## **Digital/hybrid theater performances**

We aim to jointly attend at least two digital or hybrid theater evenings during the semester. Student tickets will be covered by OSUN. Further updates on scheduling performances will occur at the beginning of the semester.

## **Assignments**

### **The Living Archive (progressive assignments)**

Over the course of the semester, we will be building our own Living Archive together with the other participating campuses to document our engagements with digital theaters. You will be asked to add several contributions:

- **Living Archive 1: The Seed**

Please bring a “radiant image” to the first class; it can be physical or digital and will be shared across the various campuses and represents a seed from which the collaborations across the semester will grow and germinate. The “radiant image” captures something that you are passionate about.

- **Living Archive 2: The Interview - Where do I come from? How did I get here?**

Your task is to create a 5-7min interview with the help of any digital platform. In the interview, introduce each other to a digital object (meme, image, screen shot, post, etc.) that tells your partner something about you. Why would it be worth keeping this object and what kind of archive would house this object?

Please post your interview on the Padlet and listen to and comment on at least three other interviews.

- **Living Archive 3: Creative Response**

For this assignment, you will be matched with a student from the current partner campus to choose two digital festival performances that you attend together (synchronously/asynchronously). Then, create an artistic response that should be based on an aspect of the performance that you found particularly striking in how it deals with either documentation, liveness or participation in the festival. Your response should be 3-5min long and audio- or video-based.

- **Mind Mapping**

For this assignment, all Digital Theatres Cohorts will collaborate to create a joint mind map of the core concepts and practices that we have encountered in the class on the digital platform miro.com. In preparation for the joint Mind Map creation, please come together in local groups of 3-4 students to come up with a list of three concepts or digital practices that you briefly describe in your own words (images and sound files possible) and post on the Padlet.

Be ready to explain your ideas/definitions to the other cohorts. In class, all cohorts together will create a visual Mind Map of Digital Theatres and our themes and discussions; you can then use the Mind Map as a resource of themes to tackle as you move into the final project.

- **Performing the Living Archive - Final Projects: Put 3 in, take 3 out!**

Group assignment: Over the course of this semester you have all jointly built a Living Archive: now perform this archive! Your task in the final project is to create a digital performance out of the existing Living Archive contributions that all the cohorts have gathered. Choose 3 pieces that cohorts in other campuses have posted to our joint Living Archive. Create a time-based artistic response (3-10min) that integrate/respond to your chosen Living archive contributions and that reflect one of the key themes of the class. Think of your interaction with these other contributions as a kind of chain letter. Your piece should sketch what performance can/might look like in the future.

## Grade Breakdown

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Participation & Collaboration with Partners:  | 25%       |
| (participation includes attendance, contributions to discussions and exercises, regular padlet postings, archive contributions, active collaboration with partners, communication with Professors and other students) |           |
| Interview Assignment  | Pass/Fail |
| Creative Response   | 20%       |
| Midterm Essay   | 25%       |
| Mind Mapping  | Pass/Fail |
| Final Performance Project   | 30%       |

## SCHEDULE

**\*\*Please note that this schedule is subject to change according to theater programs and events at participating campuses\*\***

### SECTION I: DOCUMENTATION

#### WEEK 1, Tuesday August 30, 2022:

#### Introduction to Digital Theatres - The Idea of Documentation

##### **Assignment due: Living Archive 1 - The Seed**

- **Important:** Please bring a “radiant image” to the first class; it can be physical or digital and will be shared across the various campuses and represents a seed from which the collaborations across the semester will grow and germinate. The “radiant image” captures something that you are passionate about.

##### **Readings/AV-material:**

- Jared Mezzocchi: “All the Screen’s A Stage”: <https://www.americantheatre.org/2021/09/22/all-the-screens-a-stage-a-transmedia-manifesto/>

##### **In class examples:**

Examples of creative documentation:

- Joshua Gelb: *Theatre in Quarantine*  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqMhCVLpToyrC9Xj1-WWSfg>
- *Die Balkone*, curated by Övül Ö. Durmusoglu and Joanna Warsza  
<https://www.diebalkone.net/>
- Carmen Gil Vrolijk: *Infinitos*  
<https://infinitos.co/en/home/>
- video lecture: *Making Theater during Covid* (Carmen Gil Vrolijk and Pedro Salazar, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá)

#### WEEK 2, Tuesday September 6: Pandemic Histories and Futures

##### **Mini assignment due:**

- Look at three other creative archives from the list and post a short reflection on the Padlet (share Padlet with BCA)

##### **Readings/AV-material:**

- Watch: video lecture *Performance and the Archive* (Ramona Mosse, BCB)
- Daniel Defoe: *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), excerpts
- Abigail de Kosnik: *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (2016), introduction

**WEEK 3: Tuesday September 13: Archive and Repertoire**

**Assignment due:**

- **Living Archive 2: The Interview** (BCB students pair up with BCA students)

**Readings/AV-material:**

- Watch: video lecture *Archive at the Margins* (Sanjay Kumar, CEU)
- Achille Mbembe “The Power of the Archive and its Limits” (2002)
- Voluntary reading: Christopher Balme: “Covid, Crisis and Prognosis: Prospecting the Future of Theatre” (2021)

**SECTION II: LIVENESS**

**WEEK 4, Tuesday September 20: Concepts of Liveness**

**Readings/AV-material:**

- Watch video lecture *The Concept of Liveness* (Miriam Felton-Dansky, BCA)
- Erika Fischer-Lichte: “The Concept of Performance” (2014)
- Mark Fleishman “Knowing Performance: Performance as Knowledge Paradigm in Africa” (2009)

**WEEK 5, Tuesday September 27: Digital Liveness I**

**Readings/AV-material:**

- Philip Auslander: “Digital Liveness” (2012)
- FutureStage Manifesto (2021): <http://future-stage.org/>
- Barbara Fuchs: *Theater of Lockdown. Digital and Distanced Performance in a Time of Pandemic*, introduction (2022)
- Watch: video lecture *Digital Feelings* (Fintan Walsh, Birkbeck)

**In class example:**

- DT Case Study on Livestreaming

**Special weekend performance visit**

- Attend a performance at Festival Voltare, Bogotá

**WEEK 6, Tuesday October 4: No class**

**WEEK 7 (PART ONE), Tuesday October 11: Digital Liveness II**

**Assignment due:**

- **Living Archive 3: Creative Response** (BCB students pair up with Los Andes students)

**Readings/AV-material:**

- Shoshanna Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), pp. 452-470.
- Watch: video lecture *Mediatized Theatre* (Seda Ilter, Birkbeck). **Please check out Seda Ilter's examples as suggested in her lecture.**

**WEEK 7 (PART TWO), Saturday October 15: Lab Day with all NCC partners**

**SECTION III: PARTICIPATION**

**Week 8, Tuesday October 18: New Forms of Participatory Theater**

**Readings/AV-material:**

- Matthew Reason, "Participatory Audiencing and the Committed Return" (2019)
- Watch: video lecture *Participation and Performance* (Nina Tecklenburg, BCB)

**In class example:**

- Video Case Study - HAU 4
- Interrobang ([www.interrobang-performance.com](http://www.interrobang-performance.com))
- Starting final project assignment: *Performing the Living Archive*

**FALL BREAK**

**WEEK 9, Tuesday November 1: The Politics of Participation - Access**

**Readings/AV-material:**

- US-American BIPOC theatermakers: "We See You White American Theatre" (2020)  
<https://www.weseeyouwat.com>)
- Legacy Russell: "Glitch Feminism" (2013), excerpts
- Watch case-study on *Soho Rep* (NYC): <https://drive.google.com/file/d/12TvDhfyHCW-m3P9dodLUsR11M96UWETq/view>

**In-class workshop**

- Digital Feminism (DGTL FMNSM), tbc

**OPTIONAL ONLINE VIDEO WORKSHOP Alexa West (special workshop time)**

## **WEEK 10, Tuesday November 8: Digital Ecologies**

### **Readings/AV-material:**

- Carl Lavery: "Introduction: Performance and Ecology - What can Theatre do?" (2016)
- Annette Arlander: "Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees in Johannesburg and Environs" (2020), excerpt
- Watch: video lecture *Ecologies and Networks* (Myer Taub, Witwatersrand University)

### **Online performance**

- Double Lucky Productions: *The Garden of Tangled Data*  
<https://doubleluckyproductions.org/garden-of-tangled-data/>  
<https://tangled-garden.net/>

### **In class assignment**

- Joint mind mapping assignment on MIRO

**OPTIONAL ONLINE VIDEO WORKSHOP Alexa West (special workshop time)**

## **WEEK 11, Tuesday, November 15, 2022: Final Project Development**

*This week: Individual mentoring - no joint class!*

### **Assignment due:**

- Final project rehearsal

**OPTIONAL ONLINE VIDEO WORKSHOP Alexa West (special workshop time)**

## **WEEK 12, Tuesday, November 22 : Final Project Development - Rehearsal**

### **Final project assignment:**

- individual rehearsals

### **In class**

- showing of interim result
- Feedback and defining next steps

**OPTIONAL ONLINE VIDEO WORKSHOP Alexa West (special workshop time)**

**WEEK 13: Tuesday, November 29: Final Project Dress Rehearsal**

**Final project assignment:**

- individual rehearsals

**In class**

- Internal technical rehearsal and dress rehearsal
- Feedback and defining final steps
- Class wrap-up

**WEEK 14: Tuesday, December 6: Final Project Performance Factory**

**Final project assignment:**

- individual rehearsals

**In class**

- Joint presentation with all campuses

**Week 15: Completion week (no class)**