TH261
Performance and Digital Culture
An International Student Collaboration

Course time: Tue 17:30-20:45
Seminar Leader: Nina Tecklenburg
Email: n.tecklenburg@berlin.bard.edu
Office hours: Wednesdays 10:30-13:00 or by appointment
Module: Media, Practice, Techniques

Course Description

How do performance art and theater relate to digital culture? Traditionally understood as live embodied practice and communal encounter, theater's relationship to digitality has been described as complex, challenging, even subversive. This course investigates various intersections of the performing arts and digital culture in a global collaboration to rethink theater in the digital era: students will create performances across cultures and geographic distances and explore new theatrical formats such as immersive performance, VR/AR-experiences, social media theater, or experiments with AI systems. Taught locally at BCB, we will reserve some of our class time for synchronous collaboration with students from our parallel classes in Johannesburg (South Africa), New York/Annandale (US), Bogotá (Colombia), Vienna (Austria), and London (UK). While embracing theatrical experiments with digital technology we will bring a critical lens to the study of digital culture and its inherent biases, politics of accessibility, and data surveillance.

Besides exercises and artistic reflections on class readings, each student will be able to choose one of six intensive *skill-building workshops* which will take place during four class sessions. Each workshop will be offered by an internationally renowned digital performance artist and centered around a specific practice such as techno-queer glitch performance, digital mapping, dramatic online theater, or multimedia performance. In addition, students of this course will be given the opportunity to apply for a *one-week in-person student collaboration to create a performance at Universidad de Los Andes, Bogotá/Colombia* in January 2024. This course is open to students from all disciplines. No previous experience in theater and performance is necessary.

This is an OSUN Network Collaborative Course taught in partnership with the following institutions: Bard College Annandale; Birkbeck, University of London; Central European University, Budapest/Vienna; Universidad de Los Andes, Bogotá; Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg.

Assessment

Critical thinking, creative work, collaboration: This course aims for an experimental pedagogy and a close interweaving of theory and artistic methods. Students will be assessed on their ability and willingness to fruitfully combine critical thinking and artistic practice. Furthermore, this course fosters artistic 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 our shared platform *Brightspace* and a printed reader.

Cross-campus collaborations
The class will take place at BCB's factory performance space. We will reserve a part of our class time for synchronous online meetings with students from other participating campuses to realize an international artistic collaboration amongst students and give time for workshops with artists from different performance and theater cultures.

Workshop with performance artists; performance visits
Four classes will be devoted to an intensive artistic workshop with a performance artist who works with and/or on digitality. Each student will be able to choose one of six workshops and delve into a skill-building artistic practice in the field of, for instance, **digital feminist performance/techno-queer glitch art, GPS art, dramatic online theater making, decolonial online performance, multimedia performance making**.
In addition, we aim to jointly attend at least two digital or hybrid performance events during the semester. Student tickets will be covered by OSUN. Further updates on scheduling performances will occur at the beginning of the semester.

Opportunity:
Call for student in-person collaboration in Bogotá, January 2024
For students who are interested in deepening their artistic collaboration across cultures in person, the course offers the possibility for a week-long on-site collaboration at Universidad de Los Andes, Bogotá/Colombia in January 2024. Admission is based on a competitive application process. Details to follow.

Assignments
Cross-campus exercises
The class will be structured around a series of short cross-campus collaborative performance exercises that are concerned with topics and artists discussed in class. Assignments include the

exploration of **interfaces as performance spaces, the body in virtual space, digital liveness, online self-performance and avatar-creation, social platforms as artistic encounters, subversive glitch practices, performance experiments with AI and chatbots**, and others. All assignments will be documented/recorded and shared with each other on our Brightspace space to eventually create an archive that will be exhibited at the end of the semester.

Performative presentation
Each student will be asked to give one performative presentation on a class reading. A performative presentation turns the core argument of a text into an artistically shaped experience for the class. Examples of performative presentations will be given at the beginning of the course.

Midterm essay
1500-2000 words, due on Wednesday, 18th of October 2023, midnight.

Final assignment
Students can choose between a) the creation of a short 5-10 min final performance piece that reflects on one of the topics explored in class or b) curating and setting-up the various collaborative works made during the semester for a final exhibition at BCB's Performance Factory/Open Studios in week 14.

Digital tech support
Students from this course can seek technical support by our cross-campus digital production assistant Renzo Jorge Rospigliosi Bustamente (r.rospigliosi@uniandes.edu.co). Renzo will be able to support you and your projects with software, Apps, AI tools, open source platforms; he also will be able to help you with simple coding jobs, video- and sound editing.
In addition, the BCB AV-room offers technical equipment. Janina Schabig (j.schabig@berlin.bard.edu) and Charity Ellis (c.ellis@berlin.bard.edu) will give an introduction at the beginning of the semester.

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 the 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

Attendance

Attendance of <u>all classes and off-campus excursions</u> is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, **one absence (that is, absence from one three-hour session) will not affect the participation grade or require documentation**. Please note: **two theater visits of an average length are regarded as one three-hour session.** Students are expected to attend all off-campus excursions from start to finish. If there is a scheduling / travel conflict, the instructor must be informed in advance.

● You may encounter circumstances that prevent you from attending classes for which you may be excused, meaning that the absences will not impact your grade. These circumstances include illness, religious observance, military obligation, attendance at a conference, a Bard Network event, a civic engagement initiative, a research trip or another compelling circumstance outside of your control (i.e. court appearance, visa appointment, death of a family member). Optional non-academic travel, hosting visiting family and friends, or work schedules are not grounds for excused absences.

● You will be allowed to **self-report your absences <u>one time (= one absence from one three-hour class)</u>** meaning that a notification informing your instructor about the reason for your absence before or within 24 hours of the class is sufficient. If you miss class more than once, you will need to provide your instructor with appropriate documentation in order to be excused (i.e. a doctor's note, official leave of absence).

● All unexcused absences will lower your final grade by one step (i.e. if your final grade is a B, you will be downgraded to a B-).

● If you are facing the unusual situation of long-term, serious medical or personal emergencies (generally lasting more than two weeks), you can request a Leave of Absence, to be approved by the Deans, the Head of Student Life or the Director of Academic Services.

● If you have any **general medical issues** or other concerns that could impact your compliance with these regulations, please inform your instructor during the first week of the semester.

Accommodations

● I aim to make this course accessible to all students, regardless of ability, circumstance, and resources. If you need an accommodation, please consult with Maria Anderson Long, Head of Student Life: m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu. The process for applying for disability accommodation is explained in the Student Handbook with links to the forms here: http://www.berlin.bard.edu/for-students/student-handbook/policies-and-regulations/#c4206

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.

Grade Breakdown

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.

Participation & Collaboration with Partners: **35%**
<u>Grading criteria:</u>
The participation grade includes attendance, homework, contributions to discussions and exercises, active collaboration with partners, communication with Professors and other students.

Cross-campus collaborative exercises: **Pass/Fail**

Performative Presentation: **10%**
<u>Grading criteria:</u>
Grading is based on a) the ability to turn a written argument of a reading into an artistic concept and embodied experience for the classroom in order to create an alternative insight and knowledge of the class reading, and b) the ability to verbally reflect on one's own artistic concept, choices, and outcome.

Midterm Essay   **30%**
<u>Grading criteria:</u>
Relevance/originality of the subject and its relation to questions discussed in class; clarity of a formulated question; language, style, terminology; argumentation and structure; performance analysis; conclusion.

Final presentation/exhibition: **25%**
<u>Grading criteria:</u>
Artistic/curatorial concept; relation to topics/a topic discussed in class; artistic complexity; execution/presentation

SCHEDULE

Please note that this schedule is subject to change according to theater programs

WEEK 1, Tuesday September 5: Introductions
In-class activities
- Introductions
- Hito Steyerl: The Fifth Wall (2021)
  https://www.hebbel-am-ufer.de/en/hau3000/hito-steyerl-the-fifth-wall
- Example: Gob Squad *Show Me a Good Time*, excerpts (2020, Germany/UK)
- Short exercise with partner campus

SECTION I: LIVENESS

WEEK 2, Tuesday September 12: Concepts of Liveness
Viewings
- Big Art Group *SOS* (2008, USA)
- Video lecture by Miriam Felton-Dansky: *Liveness and Performance in the Digital World*

Reading
- Philip Auslander: "Digital Liveness"

Voluntary readings
- Script: Big Art Group *SOS*

In-class Activities
- Performative presentation on Auslander
- Showing by partner campuses (Meeting with Bard Annandale, Wits, Los Andes)

WEEK 3: Tuesday September 19: Mediaturgy and Interfaces
Viewings
- Ashley Tata: *Mad Forest* by Caryl Churchill (2020, USA), excerpts
- Video lecture by Seda Ilter: *Mediatized Theatre*

Readings
- America Artist: *Black Gooey Universe*
- Caryl Churchill: *Love and Information*

Voluntary Reading
- Interview with America Artist: https://www.collecteurs.com/interview/nothing-more-american-in-conversation-with-american-artist

In-class Activities
- Exercise with partner campus: Interfaces as theatrical space (based on Caryl Churchill: *Love and Information*)

SECTION II: EMBODIMENT

WEEK 4, Tuesday September 26: Phygitality - Glitching and Bodyhacking
Viewings
- Video lecture by Fintan Walsh: *Digital Feelings*
- Anan Fries & Malu Peters: *The Host* (2021, Germany)
- Anan Fries' work: *https://ananfries.net/#*

Reading
- Legacy Russell: *Glitch Feminism*, excerpts

In-class activities

- Performative Presentation on Legacy Russell
- Performance examples:
Nelisiwe Xaba and Mocke J Van Vueren: *Uncles & Angels* (2013, South Africa)
Bioscenica: *El Abrazo* (2021, Colombia)
- Exercise with partner campus: Create a glitch

WEEK 5, Tuesday October 3: DAY OF GERMAN REUNIFICATION – no class
PERFORMANCE VISIT:
Janne Nora Kummer and allapopp (exact date and time tbc)
For BCB campus: HAU3; for other campuses: HAU4 digital stage

WEEK 6, Tuesday October 10: Cyborgs, Robots and Avatars
Homework: practical assignment

- Create a super-being/digital creature/avatar of yourself on a chosen platform. ***Please seek for technical support by Renzo Jorge Rospigliosi Bustamante if needed.*** Share your avatar with a student from Bard Annandale and post a summary of your discussion on padlet. Be ready to present your avatar in class.
Reading
- Jennifer Parker-Starbuck: "Why Cyborg Theatre?", in: *Cyborg Theatre – Corporeal*, pp. 1-11.
- Ruha Benjamin: *Race after Technology* (excerpts)

In-class Activities

- Performative Presentation on Ruha Benjamin
- Share your avatar

PERFORMANCE VISIT: Thursday October 12 (exact time tbc)

- VR game presentation: Indigenous Alaskan VR game (Game Lab, Matters of Activity – Cluster of Excellence Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Sophienstraße 22a, 10178 Berlin)

Week 7: Tuesday October 17: Virtual Reality + WORKSHOP DAY 1
+ Saturday October 21: LAB DAY WITH INTERROBANG
Midterm Essay

- Due: Wed, October 18, midnight
Reading
- Elanor Dare: "Diffracting Virtual Realities: Towards an A-effected VR", *Performance Research* (2020)

In class Activities

- Discussing VR performance visit
- Midterm evaluation/feedback
- Dividing up into groups: WORKSHOP I

REHEARSAL VISIT: Interrobang, Saturday 21 ca. 5pm (online):
- Tryout of Interrobang's new participatory online production *Commune AI*

FALL BREAK: 23.-27. October 2023

Week 8: Tuesday October 31: WORKSHOP DAY 2
In-class Activities
- Reflection on rehearsal visit, workshop prep
- WORKSHOP II

SECTION III: COMMUNITY + DIGITALITY

Week 9: Tuesday November 7: Politics of Social Media
Reading
- Shoshana Zuboff: *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), excerpts.
Viewings
- Interview with Frances Haugen: *Facebook, Twitter, and the Danger to Public Reason*, Hannah Arendt Center for Politics and Humanities at Bard College, 2022: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aag3DPUAzZw
- Faye Kabali-Kagwa: *The Shopping Dead* (2020, South Africa).

In-class Activities
- Performative presentation on Shoshana Zuboff
- Exercise with partner campus: social platforms

Week 10: Tuesday November 14: WORKSHOP DAY 3
In-class Activities
- Final assignment prompt
- Reflection on workshop so far and workshop prep
- WORKSHOP III

Week 11: Tuesday November 21: WORKSHOP DAY 4 - showing
Assignment
- Prep for workshop presentation
In-class Activity
- ***All students and campuses: Workshop presentations***

Week 12: Tuesday November 28: AI as Co-Creator

Viewings

- Qondiswa James (South Africa)
- Annie Dorsen (USA)
- This X Does Not Exist: https://thisxdoesnotexist.com/

Readings

- Julian Posada: "A New AI Lexicon: Labor. Why AI needs Ethics from Below".
- Annie Dorsen: "AI is plundering the imagination and replacing it with a slot machine": https://thebulletin.org/2022/10/ai-is-plundering-the-imagination-and-replacing-it-with-a-slot-machine/

Voluntary readings

- Annie Dorsen: *Algorithmic Theatre*: https://theatermagazine.org/web-features/article/algorithmic-theater
- Miriam Felton-Dansky: *Procedural Drama*: https://www.artforum.com/print/202302/miriam-felton-dansky-on-the-theater-of-annie-dorsen-89994
- Ulf Otto: "Performing the Glitch: AI Animatronics, Android Scenarios, and the Human Bias"

In-class Activities

- Final assignment: idea/draft presentation
- Exercise with partner campus: ChatGPT as co-performer

Week 13: Tuesday December 5: Alternative AI, Care and New Communities

Viewings

- Rhiannon Armstrong: The Slow GIF Movement
  https://www.rhiannonarmstrong.net/projects/%20slowgif/
  https://giphy.com/slowgifs
- Beyond AI: https://dreamingbeyond.ai/en
  Please chose one article/art work that inspires you and present it to the class.

In-class Activities

- Final assignment: draft presentation and rehearsal
- If time: Exercise with partner campus - Creative a slow GIF

Week 14: Wrap-up and Performance Factory/Open Studios

Tuesday December 12: class wrap-up, Miro-meeting with all campuses, dress rehearsal/test exhibition

Thursday December 14, evening: Technical rehearsal for The Performance Factory/Open Studios

Friday December 15, evening: Presentation at The Performance Factory/Open Studios

Bard College Berlin

A LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

Facility Guidelines:
"The Factory" – Eichenstrasse 43
The Factory Policy Agreement

1. "The Factory" at BCB (Eichenstrasse 43) has space and facilities available to BCB students with an academic purpose for using the building. Mandatory in-class orientations are required to retain chip access to the Factory. Chip access to The Factory is from 7am to 10pm everyday during the semester. At 10pm students will be asked to leave the building by BCB security personnel.
2. Students agree to only use the common spaces that are available for their needs, and must respect private spaces that are off-limits. For requesting to reserve the dance / theater space and / or Seminar Room 6, please fill out the online Factory Reservation Form. The Factory Staff will get back to you within two weekdays. (Monday - Friday).
3. No smoking is allowed anywhere inside the building. There are to be no projects using open flames (such as candles, torches, lanterns, fireworks, etc.) inside any part of the building.
4. Fire exits and lanes must be kept clear of any obstructions.
5. Spray painting and handling of any hazardous (chemical or combustible) material is not allowed inside the building. Contact the Studio Arts Manager concerning working with these materials. All work surfaces (indoor and outdoor) must be properly protected with a drop cloth or a packing paper provided by the workshop.
6. No sandals, flip-flops, or bare feet will be allowed inside the workshop and studio 6.
7. Students must make sure all lights are turned off and doors are closed when leaving the building. No windows or doors are to be left opened or cracked. All electrical items must be unplugged when not in use.
8. If BCB workshop tools must be borrowed for a purpose outside of the building, please contact The Studio Arts Manager (by appointment).
9. There are to be no architectural changes to studios or any areas inside or outside of the building without first speaking with the Studio Arts Manager.
10. During completion week, any space used by a student must be returned empty with clean walls and floors. All garbage must be bagged (or boxed) and properly disposed of. Final grades may be penalized and / or fines imposed if items are left (or renovations unfinished) by the inspection deadline.
11. Contact Studio Arts Manager directly with any questions: j.park@berlin.bard.edu

AV Facilities – Platanenstrasse 98 (downstairs)
1. BCB's AV (Audio / Visual) facilities provide a limited quantity of AV equipment to support those students enrolled in arts classes that require specific items. AV facilities do not include any black and white or color printing services for students.
2. The opening times may change every semester to adapt to specific course times. Borrowing equipment is currently implemented by scheduling an advance appointment through this link: https://avroom.youcanbook.me/
AV facilities are ONLY available during days when classes are held (closed during official BCB holidays).
3. All items checked out are due back during AV hours the following day, unless other arrangements have been made in advance directly with AV Staff.
4. Items to be reserved on a specific date should be requested at least one week in advance. Without reservation, availability is limited to a first-come, first-serve basis.
5. The AV Staff may exclude students from borrowing items at any time, if the student:
   ● failed to return items in time
   ● failed to return items in person (pick up and/ or return by friends is not allowed)
   ● returned items with missing pieces
   ● returned items damaged or in poor shape
6. AV equipment will be given out only to those students responsible in organizing, picking up as well as returning their items IN PERSON. No exceptions.
7. All items returned late, regardless of patron's position at BCB, will be subject to a 1 Euro fine, per day.
8. Any item returned without accessories (such as cables, SD card, batteries, tripod head, lens cap, etc) will be subject to a 1 Euro fine, per day (the same as late returns).
9. Any items missing will be subject to patron reimbursement for its value (or under special circumstances, replacement, at the discretion of AV Staff). Any items damaged or malfunctioning are expected to be reported to Staff upon check-in.
10. Please use the AV email to inquire about equipment or policy, as well as to reserve (av@berlin.bard.edu). Do not contact AV Staff through their personal emails.

11. We strongly suggest personally visiting the facilities to inquire and reserve before borrowing equipment!
12. AV equipment is limited at BCB. Whenever possible students are encouraged to use their own devices (computers, cameras) for production purposes.
13. Contact AV Staff directly with any questions: av@berlin.bard.edu

Photo Darkroom Facilities – Platanenstrasse 98 (downstairs)
Computer Pool and Media Lab – Kuckhoffstrasse 24 (upstairs)

** Guidelines to be offered during orientations.