

TH261

Performance and Digital Culture

Course time: Tue 14:00-17:15

Seminar Leader: Nina Tecklenburg

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Office hours: by appointment

Course Description

How does 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 to rethink and re-do theater in the digital era: students will explore new theatrical formats such as hybrid performances, immersive VR-experiences, social media theater, glitch art, or the potentials and limits of integrating Artificial Intelligence systems into performance making. 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, data surveillance, commodification and its potential danger to democratic societies. We will ask how theater and performance as communal art forms can respond to these fundamental changes.

As a former OSUN Network Collaborative Course, we will also aim to investigate the relation between performance and digital culture from a global perspective. Taught locally at BCB, we will reserve one extended workshop-based class for (a)synchronous collaboration with students from parallel classes taught at Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg (South Africa), Bard College Annandale (US) and Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá (Colombia).

Assignments

In-class assignments

The classes will be structured around short collaborative performance exercises that are concerned with topics, readings and artistic practices discussed in class. These assignments include the exploration of interfaces as performance spaces, the body in virtual space, digital liveness, online self-performance, avatar-creation, subversive glitch practices, performance experiments with various AI systems, and others. Some of the exercises will be documented/recorded and shared with students from our parallel campuses.

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 Friday, 10th of October 2025, midnight.

Final performance project

Students are asked to create a ca. 10-15 min final performance piece – as a solo or group work – that reflects on one of the key topics explored in class. The performance will be shown at BCB's Performance Factory/Open Studios in week 14.

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 openness to fruitfully combine artistic practice and critical thinking. This course fosters artistic collaboration amongst students. 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.

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 and video mini-lectures will be made available through google classroom.

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

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and

maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes and off-campus excursions 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 will be allowed to self-report your absences one time (= one absence from one three-hour class) 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-).

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Policy on Late Submission of Artworks / Presentations

Assignments (artworks, essays, performances, oral presentations) that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (Example: B+ becomes C+). The Professor is not obliged to accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it

should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students may make an appointment to discuss assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

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 30%

Grading criteria:

The participation grade includes attendance, homework, contributions to discussions and exercises, active collaboration with partners, communication with professor and other students.

Performative Presentation: 10%

Grading criteria:

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%

Grading criteria:

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 performance project: 30%

Grading criteria:

Artistic concept; ability to self-reflect on the project and artistic process (regular rehearsal journal), 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 2: Introductions

In-class activities

- Introductions
- Hito Steyerl: *The Fifth Wall* (2021)

<https://www.hebbel-am-ufer.de/en/hau3000/hito-steyerl-the-fifth-wall>

WEEK 2, Tuesday September 9: Concepts of (Digital) Liveness

Viewings due

- Video lecture by Miriam Felton-Dansky: *Liveness and Performance in the Digital World*

Readings due

- Erika Fischer-Lichte: "The Concept of Performance"
- Philip Auslander: "Digital Liveness"
- Voluntary reading: Jorge Dubatti: "Convivio and Tecnovivio"

In-class Activities

- Performative presentation on Auslander and/or Fischer-Lichte
- Performance Example: Gob Squad *Show Me a Good Time*, excerpts (2020, Germany/UK)

***** POSSIBLE PERFORMANCE VISIT (date tbc) *****

WEEK 3, Tuesday September 16: Mediaturgy and Interfaces

Viewings due

- Ashley Tata: *Mad Forest* by Caryl Churchill (2020, USA), excerpts
- Video lecture by Seda Ilter: *Mediatized Theatre*

Readings due

- American Artist: *Black Goopy Universe*
- Interview with American Artist: <https://www.collecteurs.com/interview/nothing-more-american-in-conversation-with-american-artist>

In-class Activities

- Discussion on viewings and readings
- Exercise on digital liveness

***** POSSIBLE PERFORMANCE VISIT (date tbc) *****

WEEK 4: Tuesday September 23: Phygitality - Glitching and Bodyhacking

Viewings due

- Video lecture by Fintan Walsh: *Digital Feelings*
- Anan Fries & Malu Peters: *The Host* (2021, Germany)
<https://ananfries.net/#>
- Keiken: *Spirit Systems of Soft Knowing*: <https://keiken.cloud/work/spirit-systems-of-soft-knowing/>

Reading due

- Legacy Russell: *Glitch Feminism*, excerpts

In-class activities

- Performative Presentation on Legacy Russell
- Performance examples
- Midterm essay prompt
- Exercise: Create a glitch

CROSS-CAMPUS LAB DAY:

Saturday September 27: LAB DAY with partner campuses
(Wits Johannesburg, Bard College Annandale)

WEEK 5, Tuesday September 30: Cyborgs, Robots and Avatars

Homework: practical assignment due

- Create a super-being/digital creature/avatar of yourself on a chosen platform. Share your avatar on padlet. Be ready to present your avatar in class.

Reading due

- Ruha Benjamin: *Race after Technology* (excerpts)

In-class Activities

- Performative Presentation on Ruha Benjamin
- Exercise on avatar creation

WEEK 6, Tuesday October 7: Politics of Social Media

Reading due

- Shoshana Zuboff: *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), excerpts.

Viewings due

- 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>

In-class Activities

- Performative Presentation on Shoshana Zuboff
- Examples: onlinetheater.live (translation to English will be provided)
MYKE (2024, project on masculinity and social media)
<https://www.myke.fyi/en/docs/willkommen>
<https://www.onlinetheater.live/project/myke>
Loulu (2022, project about right wing extremism and social media):
<https://www.onlinetheater.live/project/loulu>

Midterm Essay due

- Due: Friday, October 10, midnight

Week 7, Tuesday October 14: Ethics of AI

Reading due

- Kate Crawford: *Atlas of AI*, excerpts
- Julian Posada: "A New AI Lexicon: Labor. Why AI needs Ethics from Below".

Viewings due

- Audrey Tang, interview: *Future-proofing Democracy in the Age of AI* (link will be provided)

In class Activities

- Performative presentation on Kate Crawford
- Art and performance examples:
Elisa Giardina Papa: *On Training AI* (2022), *Cleaning Emotional Data* (2020)
Interrobang: *Chatbot Challenge* (2024)
- Exercise on ChatGPT

FALL BREAK: 20.-26. October 2025

Week 8, Tuesday October 28: The Theater of ChatGPT

Homework due

- Create short performance in groups using ChatGPT as stage persona

In-class Activities

- Rehearsals, showing & feedback
- Exercise on artistic collaboration (in preparation for final performance project)

Week 9, Tuesday November 4: AI and Bias

Viewings due

- Claudix Vanesix: *Non Fuckable Tokens* (2024)
<https://claudixvanesix.com/>
<https://www.instagram.com/claudixvanesix/?hl=de>
- Theresa Reiwer: *Decoding Bias* (2023)
<http://www.theresareiwer.de/>
<http://www.theresareiwer.de/portfolio/decoding-bias/>

In-class Activities

- Discussion performance examples
- Performance exercise with StreamDiffusion by TouchDesigner

Week 10, Tuesday November 11: The Theater of StreamDiffusion

Homework due

- In groups: work on short StreamDiffusion-performance
- Bring a first idea for final performance project

In-class Activities

- StreamDiffusion project: rehearsals, presentation + feedback
- Final project: pitch your idea; teaming up for final project

Week 11, Tuesday November 18: Final Project

Assignment due

- Final project: rehearsal + journaling

In-class Activity

- Final project: draft presentation + feedback

Week 12, Tuesday November 25: Final Project

Assignment due

- Final project: rehearsal + journaling

In-class Activity

- Final project: draft presentation + feedback

Week 13, Tuesday December 2: Final Project

Assignment due

- Final project: rehearsal + journaling

In-class Activity

- Final project: draft presentation + feedback

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

Assignment due

- Final project: rehearsal + journaling

Tuesday December 9: class wrap-up, dress rehearsal, final feedback round

Following dates tbc:

Thursday December 11, evening: Technical rehearsal for The Performance Factory/Open Studios

Friday December 12, evening: Presentation at The Performance Factory/Open Studios

Policy on the use of facilities

1. The Factory (Eichenstrasse 43) and Monopol (Provinzstr 40-44) at BCB offer space and facilities to BCB art students. Chip access is from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day, including the weekends during the semester. The buildings cannot be used outside these hours.
2. Fire exits and lanes must be kept clear of any obstructions.
3. Students agree only to use the designated class spaces or communal workshops. Respecting the building and its facilities is crucial, as they are shared resources that need to be preserved for the benefit of all.
4. For your safety and the safety of others, smoking and drinking alcohol are strictly prohibited anywhere inside the building.
5. Unauthorized events and/or parties are not permitted. Projects using open flames (such as candles, torches, lanterns, fireworks, etc.) are not permitted inside the building.
6. Spray painting and handling any hazardous (chemical or combustible) material is not permitted inside the building.
7. All work surfaces (indoor and outdoor) must be adequately protected with the workshop's drop cloth before spray painting or working with plaster.
8. During completion week, any space used by a student must be emptied, with clean walls and floors. All garbage must be adequately disposed of. Final grades may be affected or withheld if any item remains by the inspection deadline.
9. When leaving the building, students must ensure all lights are turned off, all electrical items must be unplugged, and doors must be closed.
10. Contact the Studio art manager directly with any questions: j.park@berlin.bard.edu

Emergency phone numbers:

Police (calling from a German landline or cellphone): 110

Fire (calling from a German landline or cellphone): 112

Ambulance and Paramedics (calling from a German landline or cellphone): 112

Out-of-Hours Medical Care (calling from a German landline or cellphone) : 116 117