Course Objectives

The readings, viewings, and activities in this course will provide students the opportunity to:

- Investigate alternative performance strategies from 1960 to the present.
- Analyze major dramatic works from 1960 to the present.
- Refine written and oral communication skills.
- Practice and enhance collaborative skills.
- Demonstrate and advance research skills.
- Broaden their cultural and artistic perspectives.
- Articulate and define individual aesthetic values.
- Synthesize theoretical and experiential knowledge and practices.

Components of the Course Grade

Aronson reactions: 15%

Write on 5 of 7 chapters in *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History*—each submission is worth 3%. These short writing assignments will build toward the manifesto described below by addressing how one or more artists covered in the chapter reacts to the key course issues noted in the next assignment.

Manifesto: 20%

You will use course readings and viewing to formulate your own statement of artistic principles and values. In addition, you will research and incorporate the work and ideas of one artist not directly covered in the course materials in your manifesto.

Topics and issues that should be covered in your manifesto:

1. Importance of narrative/story
2. Value of language
3. Relationship between audience and performers
4. Type of theatrical space/place of presentation
5. Hierarchy of theatrical elements
6. Collective creation vs. individual auteur
7. Level of technological sophistication
8. Turning outward (politics, activism, community-driven) vs. turning inward (personal stories, individual perception)
9. Ideal spectator reaction: trance, political awakening, shock, pure entertainment, etc.
10. Value and use of historical forms and canonical texts
11. Influence of non-theatrical forms
12. Level of improvisation
13. Feelings about government and corporate funding
14. Ultimate aim
15. Important issues of your own (might relate to race, gender, class, sexuality, spirituality)

You should cover at least 10 of these issues in your manifesto.

References

Your manifesto needs to reference directly groups and artists we’ve studied and at least one artist we haven’t. You may do this within the body of the text or in a system of end notes or footnotes of your own devising.

Length: Minimum of 5 double-spaced pages (including notes)
Due date: 10/15 at the beginning of the class period

In-class writings on plays: 15%

Most days that a play is assigned, there will be an in-class writing activity. The writing assignments will be designed to assess your out of class preparation and to offer you the opportunity to organize your thoughts about the readings before the class discussion. You must be present in class at the time the writing activity takes place in order to earn these points.

General participation: 10%

You will be graded on the quality and quantity of your discussion participation.

Project: 20%

In groups of 4-7, students will collaborate to plan a mock production of one of the plays we’ve studied over the course of the semester. Students may work as actor, designer, director, or dramaturg. Groups will present their work to the class during the last week of class. Individuals will turn in work specific to their function on the artistic team (full assignment sheet provided later in the semester). There will be two partial in-class working sessions and one full-class working session for the project, but you are also expected to meet outside of class to prepare your presentation. The number of required out of class meetings will depend on whether you choose to perform a scene from the play as part of your presentation. Each group presentation should take approximately 15-20 minutes.

Final Paper: 20%

You will write a 5-7 page essay comparing the work of artists in the first half of the course to writers in the second half of the course. Details of the assignment will be available later in the semester.
Attendance policy

You may miss class two times without any penalty to your grade. After two absences, each subsequent absence will result in one-third of a letter deduction from your course grade.

Plagiarism and academic misconduct

All forms of plagiarism and academic misconduct are strictly forbidden. All work you submit must be new, original, and specific to this class. If at any time you are uncertain about this policy and what it entails, please just ask me.

Class Schedule

*Indicates play in the Longman Anthology. All other plays are in separate editions. All readings are required. Schedule is subject to change.

8/27 Introduction to course; letters of introduction
8/29 Review Dev 2

9/3 Labor Day
9/5 Aronson, Preface and 1-19

9/10 Aronson, 20-41
9/12 Cage video

9/17 Aronson, 42-74 and Living Theatre clips
9/19 Aronson 75-107 and Open Theatre clips, Serban and Bread and Puppet clips

9/24 Aronson 108-43; Rainer and Deren clips
9/26 Robert Wilson video

10/1 Aronson 144-80, Spalding Gray and Laurie Anderson clips
10/3 No class—work on your manifesto

10/8 Discuss Becoming and NEA 4 (electronic reserve)
10/10 Aronson 181-211 and conclusion; House/Lights clips

10/15 Manifestos due—share in class
10/17 Introduction to second half of course and project discussion

10/22 American Dream* and Albee introduction
10/24 Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf

10/29 Buried Child*
10/31 Top Girls* and project work

11/5 Angels in America*
11/7 Top Dog/Underdog

11/12 Project working day
11/14 Long Christmas Ride Home
11/26  *August: Osage County* and project working day
11/28  *Next to Normal* and musical theatre

12/3  *Clybourne Park* and *Raisin in the Sun*
12/5  *Water by the Spoonful*

12/10  Projects
12/12  Projects

12/18  Final paper due at start of exam time: noon. We’ll discuss papers during the exam period, 12-2.

Ground rules for discussions
(adapted from Susan Ambrose’s *How Learning Works*, 248-9)

- Arrive on time.
- Turn your cellphone off.
- Use phones and computers during class only for legitimate class activities.
- Bring assigned readings with you.

- Listen actively.
- Build on one another’s comments.
- Do not interrupt one another.
- Ask for clarification if you are confused.
- Critique ideas, not people.
- Challenge one another, but do so respectfully.
- If you are offended by anything said in discussion, acknowledge it immediately.
- Support opinions with evidence.
- Do not monopolize discussion.

- Take responsibility for the quality of the discussion.

- Other rules recommended by the class: