



Boston University Study Abroad

London

Introduction to Performance

CAS EN 145

Course description

This course will introduce you to key theory, practices and discourses around contemporary performance and moving image. You will consider how these debates can inform your own critical thinking around issues of representation, identity, spaces, the body and performance practice in its most expanded sense and in relation to interdisciplinary processes. For example, we will consider the role of the still in relation to the moving image, lens-based documentation vs the live event, writing as performance, sounding the voice and imaging the body. There will be performative and audio-visual lectures, readings, discussions, student led presentations / performances and experimental practical exercises each week to help you integrate your ideas through making. The final outputs should include some reflection on how you as a practitioner have interrogated *through experimental and interdisciplinary making* one or more of the conceptual and contextual themes raised in this unit.

Performance “as a visual art” is distinct from, but also related to, theatre. It’s “live art by artists” and, as RoseLee Goldberg defines it, “most often the vision of a single artist, responsible for every element of the work. The artist is director, playwright, performer and lighting, costume and set designer rolled into one.” Unlike a play, a performance is also usually not repeated. The Live Art Development Agency (LADA) defines live art as such: “From intimate encounters to civic spectacles, from attendance at shows and installations to mass participation in virtual events, Live Art practices are concerned with all kinds of interventions in the public sphere and all kinds of interaction with an audience.” Traditionally scholars separate performance and text, see the text as leading to performance, but, as Julia Jarcho argues, writing can also act “as a disruptive theatrical force in its own right” and can “do theatrical work on the page”.

This course uses performance as a critical lens—and specific performance works as invitations—to think about agency, the body, knowledge, (in)visibility, community, ephemerality, documentation, accessibility, disability, audience, participation, medium-specificity, formal experimentation, and identity. With a focus on 20th and 21st-cent. performance in a visual and live art context, we will examine the multi-media, interdisciplinary work of the historical avant-gardes (such as Dada, Bauhaus, and Futurism) and performance as it appears in dance, live poetry readings, poets theatre, videos, and digital work, drawing on feminist, queer, and intersectional perspectives. Further, we will consider the differences between performance art and theatre as well as performative writing on the page. The seminar hopes to foster a critical sensibility through close reading, close listening, and attentive viewing *of*—but also practice-based creative experiments *with*—performance. Placing each work in its specific material, cultural, or social context, we will consider the medial translation a performance undergoes when it appears as a textual document (in the form of a script, a book, an exhibition catalogue), or as a visual or sonic document (in a

photograph, video, or sound recording). We will also explore performances made specifically for camera or for the page. The course will include class visits from contemporary artists. The class will also feature practice-based workshops, in which we will experiment with forms of live reading and performative explorations of text, movement, and interactions with objects in space.

Course Objectives (BU Hub Learning Outcomes):

PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY AND LIFE'S MEANINGS

1. Students will demonstrate knowledge of notable works in performance, make meaningful connections among them, and be able to relate those works to their own lives and those of others. All selected works engage directly with the philosophical questions around political and personal agency, power and hierarchies, audience empowerment and emancipation. Students will encounter performance through text, video, audio, and live. The secondary reading on the syllabus includes notable canonical and non-canonical scholarship associated with performance studies, performance art, theatre studies, and contemporary curation. All the performance works and texts invite students to consider philosophical and political questions about liveness, documentation, canonisation, archiving, politics, inequality, community, sexual and gender identity, ephemerality and permanence. They also all invite reflection on how aesthetic form might be in conversation with political intentions or run counter to them. The majority of selected performance works are by BIPOC, female, queer, trans, and non-binary artists and philosophers.
2. Students will learn to think critically about the political embeddedness of the body, language, literature, and culture. They will consider the implications for community and collaboration; and how artists think through issues of racism, classism, misogyny, and homophobia. They will learn abstract thinking from concrete examples in their viewing and reading; they will develop their writing skills to make convincing arguments, and to hone their reading skills and analytic skills. The issues raised in the works we discuss (e.g. the body, embodied knowledge, visibility/invisibility, ephemerality, documentation, formal experimentation, sexual or cultural identity) will be explored practically through oral and written communication and through performance experiments.

AESTHETIC EXPLORATION

1. The range of materials and approaches—from historical avant-garde performance (such as Dada, Bauhaus, Futurism), to dance, to 1960s feminist performance art, to contemporary performance art, to video art, and live poetry readings as performance to performative writing for the page—will increase students' breadth of knowledge of what can constitute performance. They will also learn about various aesthetic forms across genres and media and what the different motivations for each of these stylistic decisions are and what their effects could be. We will consider questions around community, exclusion/inclusion, accessibility, originality, authority, audience, medium-specificity, ephemerality, documentation, as well as questions about methodology: how do we write about live art? What can a performative angle add to our skillset of analysing and viewing works?
2. In order to understand the often complex and nuanced materials on the syllabus, students will hone their skills of analysing works in different media (reading texts, watching videos, reviewing live performance); improve their ability to analyse,

interpret, and express their thoughts in writing and class discussion. The course thus teaches them skills of different forms of writing and gives them the experience of performing themselves. This practice-based angle is crucial and teaches students about embodied forms of knowledge and how they can answer their research questions through performative experiments. Students will improve and demonstrate their ability to speak and write eloquently. They will expand their critical vocabulary and gain more confidence in speaking and writing in different modes. Lastly, they will also learn to collaborate.

3. Students are required to write critical commentaries engaging with course materials and secondary scholarship; in addition, they are asked to complete creative writing exercises and collaborative performance exercises.

CREATIVITY/INNOVATION

1. Students will work on a number of writing exercises and performance workshops. These will range from preparing their own so-called ‘sound poems’ and plan a performative reading in small groups to be presented the following session. They will also do a creative close listening of a recorded poem or performance text, and present it in class, either in the form of a live reading or a recorded text/online podcast. These exercises will alert students practically (rather than just abstractly and theoretically) to the nuances of the choices writers and artists make when they produce work.
2. Students will participate in a performance workshop based on a number of performance exercises inspired by Despina Zacharopolou and Harold Offeh (tbc) and they will experiment with materials (such as clay, string, paper) in relation to text and performance. In this way, students will test ideas about, say, the body, ability/disability, vision, authority, pronouns, audience address, inclusion, accessibility, embodied thinking and visual thinking, movement and stillness, by trying things out themselves rather than writing ‘about’ such experiments conducted by other performance artists.
3. Students will have the opportunity to benefit from class visits from contemporary practitioners. Students will thus gain creative and curatorial insight into contemporary performance practices first hand: this will help their professional development and make the subject matter lively, fun, and relatable.

Grading

The following Boston University table explains the grading system that is used by most faculty members on Boston University’s Study Abroad London Programmes.

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Honour Points</u>	<u>Usual %</u>
A	4.0	93-100
A-	3.7	89-92
B+	3.3	85-88
B	3.0	81-84
B-	2.7	77-80
C+	2.3	73-76
C	2.0	69-72
C-	1.7	65-68
D	1.0	60-64
F	0.0	Unmarked

Grading Criteria

‘Incomplete’ or **I** grades are not permitted because of the obvious difficulty in making up missed work once the student has left the country. All work must be completed on time. We also do not allow **‘Audits’** (AU), **‘Withdrawals’** (W), or **‘Pass/Fail’** (P) grades.

The grades reflect the quality of the work. Lecturers and students should use the following criteria for an understanding of what each grade means.

A This exceptional grade is assigned only to work that has persistently outstanding quality in both substance and presentation. The student must demonstrate a sustained capacity for independent thought and extensive study, producing rigorous and convincing analyses in well-ordered prose.

A- Awarded to work that is clearly focused and analytical, and based on wide reading. The student must cover all the principal points of a question and systematically develop a persuasive overall thesis, allowing for one or two venial omissions or inapt expressions.

B+, B, B- This range of grades indicates that the student has shown some evidence of original thought and intellectual initiative. The student has cited sources beyond the class materials, and shown a degree of originality in perception and/or approach to the subject. The work will show thoughtful management of material, and a good grasp of the issues. The differences between a B+, a straight B and a B- may reflect poor presentation of the material, or mistakes in punctuation, spelling and grammar.

C+, C, C- Work in this grade range is satisfactory, but uninspiring. If the work is simply a recitation of the class materials or discussions, and shows no sign of genuine intellectual engagement with the issues, it cannot deserve a higher grade. Should an essay fail to provide a clear answer to the question as set, or argue a position coherently, the grade will fall within this range.

Quality of presentation can lift such work into the upper levels of this grade range. Work of this quality which is poorly presented, and riddled with errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation, will fall into the lower end of the range. To earn a C grade, the work must demonstrate that the student is familiar with the primary course material, be written well enough to be readily understood, be relevant to the assignment, and, of course, be the student’s own work except where properly cited.

D A marginal pass can be given where some but not all the elements of the course have been completed satisfactorily.

F The failing grade indicates the work is seriously flawed in one or more ways:

- Obvious lack of familiarity with the material
- So poorly written as to defy understanding
- So brief and insubstantial that it fails to properly address the subject
- Material presented is not relevant to the assignment
- Demonstrates evidence of plagiarism (see following section in Academic Conduct Code)

Please refer to the Academic Handbook for detailed grading criteria and policies on plagiarism. This can be accessed via Blackboard Learn: <http://learn.bu.edu>

** Final Grades are subject to deductions by the Academic Affairs Office due to unauthorised absences.*

Attendance Policies

Classes

All Boston University London Programme students are expected to attend every class session, seminar, and field trip to fulfil the required course contact hours and receive course credit. Any student that has been absent from two class sessions (whether authorised or unauthorised) will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their continued participation on the programme.

Authorised Absence:

The Authorised Absence Approval Request Form is available through the Academic Affairs section of the BU London Personal Page: <https://fm.bu-london.co.uk/fmi/webd/>

Please note: Submitting an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form does not guarantee an authorised absence

Students who expect in advance to be absent from any class should notify a member of Academic Affairs and complete an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form ten working days in advance of the class date.

Students may apply for an authorised absence only under the following circumstances:

- **Illness (first day of sickness):** If a student is too ill to attend class, the student must notify Academic Affairs as soon as possible by submitting an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form in advance of the class. If it is the student's first absence of the semester (from any class) a doctor's note is not required.
- **Illness (multiple days):** If a student is missing more than one class day due to illness, the student must complete an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form and a sick note from a local doctor excusing their absence from class. Once well enough, the student will need to meet with Academic Affairs.
- Important placement event that clashes with a class (verified by internship supervisor).
- Special circumstances which have been approved by the Directors (see note below).

The Directors will only in the most extreme cases allow students to leave the programme early or for a significant break.

Unauthorised Absence:

Any student to miss a class due to an unauthorised absence will receive a **4% grade penalty** to their final grade for the course whose class was missed.

This grade penalty will be applied by the Academic Affairs office to the final grade at the end of the course. As stated above, any student that has missed two classes will need to meet with Academic Affairs to discuss their participation on the programme as excessive absences may result in a 'Fail' in the class and therefore expulsion from the programme.

Religious Holidays

Boston University's Office of the University Registrar states:

‘The University, in scheduling classes on religious holidays and observances, intends that students observing those traditions be given ample opportunity to make up work. Faculty members who wish to observe religious holidays will arrange for another faculty member to meet their classes or for cancelled classes to be rescheduled.’

Special Accommodations

Each student will need to contact the Disability & Access Services to request accommodations for the semester they are abroad. Students are advised by BU-DAS not to expect the same accommodations as they receive on campus.

BU London can only uphold special accommodations if we have received the appropriate documentation from the BU-DAS. We cannot accept letters from other universities/centres.

All disabilities need to be known to the DAS in Boston if they are to be used as a reason for requiring a change in conditions, i.e. reduced internship hours or special accommodations for the internship schedule.

Lateness

Students arriving more than 15 minutes after the posted class start time will be marked as late. Any student with irregular class attendance (more than two late arrivals to class) will be required to meet with the Academic Affairs and if the lateness continues, may have their final grade penalised.