

# AESTHETICS ... in PERFORMANCE



*Style is knowing what kind of play you are in.*

— John Gielgud

(aka)

"Is it Brilliant, or is it Bullshit?"

THEA 1863      SPRING 2013      M/W/F 12-2, JMAC 107+Studios

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## COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course aims to introduce students—at an early stage of their collegiate studies—to various aesthetics or “styles” of Western theatre from diverse eras, artists/groups, locales, and schools of thought (ism’s). As various aesthetics are defined through readings/videos/discussion, the students will be asked to “realize” these styles *vis-a-vis* group exercises; further their understanding through class presentations; and participate in rigorous theoretical debates. Ultimately, each student will be asked to confront and define a personal “aesthetic”—both in word and deed—as he/she formulates a manifesto and performance detailing the goals and tools of HIS/HER theatre in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## TEXTS, Etc.

- *Twentieth Century Theatre: A Sourcebook*, ed. Richard Drain
- Articles on E-Reserves (through Blackboard "Course Reserves" link)
- Videos on Reserve (<https://coursemedia.du.edu/> or Blackboard )

## FORMAT AND EVALUATION

**This will rarely be a “lecture” course, if I can help it! Rather, we will work *as a group* to define and wrestle with various aesthetics and the issues they raise. Consequently, you cannot master this material or immerse yourself in the requisite activities if you are not here DAILY. It is expected that ALL students will regularly attend class meetings and participate fully in discussions, presentations, in-class projects and activities. Students are expected to have done the readings and to volunteer information/opinions based on the assignments, while regularly bringing something “new” to the table.**

**1. ATTENDANCE:** Attendance will be taken every day and is 10% of your grade. If attendance is going to be a problem, please drop this class.

**2. PARTICIPATION / CITIZENRY:** Participation in this seminar is crucial. Full participation and good citizenry includes attentive viewing of video/media material, active listening, insightful and constructive input, and fully invested contribution to the group performance projects; while timeliness is a sign of respect and

courtesy to the entire class. **Further, if you are asked questions about assigned readings and viewings and cannot respond, it will affect your participation grade.** Following is the **10-point grading rubric** for participation/citizensry:

9-10	Actively participated, regularly contributed to discussions/projects, on time, and courteous/attentive of others
8-9	Dutifully participated, semi-regularly contributed to discussions/projects, on time, and courteous/attentive
7-8	Seldom participated, occasionally contributed to discussions/projects, on time, and courteous/attentive
6-7	Participated and contributed only when absolutely required, on time, and courteous/attentive
0-6	Failed in regards to participation, contribution, promptness, and/or courtesy/attention

**3. Pop Quizzes:** There are no formal “exams” or term papers in the class. However, I reserve the right to give substantive “pop quizzes” on a regular basis if it appears that the class is not keeping up with the assignments on the syllabus. There may also be occasional pop quizzes to gage retention of previously covered material.

**4. Presentations:** Each student will be responsible for making a 15-minute in-class “critical” presentation (facts/style) on a book chapter or a specific aesthetic (“ism”), as well as a 5-minute “op-ed” response (opinion/rebuttal) to a different aesthetic/chapter. See “Assignments” on Blackboard for guidelines/details.

**5. Aesthetic Overviews of Live Performances:** All students are required to attend THREE live performances with distinct “aesthetics” during the quarter, and to produce an “aesthetic equivalent” (artistic piece) and a brief written explanation (at least 1 page) within one week of the event. (NOTE: Only TWO performances can be DU productions). Proof of attendance must accompany overview. See “Assignments” on Blackboard for guidelines/details.

**6. Final Aesthetic Project – Manifesto and Aesthetic Performance:** Finally, each student will author an “Art of the Theatre” manifesto (3-5 pages) and create a personal aesthetic project (2-3 minutes) at the end of the quarter.

**\*\*\* No late presentations or assignments will be accepted—no exceptions, no kidding! \*\*\***

*NOTE: While this is not a writing or portfolio course, I will deduct points as necessary for sloppy writing or presentation of materials...so please proofread, format, and organize your work accordingly.*

**FINAL NOTE: As this course is called “Aesthetics IN PERFORMANCE,” we will make extensive use of video/multi-media materials, and students will be asked regularly to participate in practical exercises/projects (“applied knowledge”). You ARE responsible for ANY materials covered during the course of class (including project work and readings/viewings), even if absent.**

## **GRADING**

▪ Attendance	10%
▪ Participation/Group Exercises	10%
▪ Critical Class Presentation (15 min.)	20%
▪ Op/Ed Response (5 min.)	5%
▪ Pop Quizzes	10%
▪ Aesthetic Overviews of 3 Performances (5% ea.)	15%
▪ Art of the Theatre Personal Manifesto	15%
▪ Personal Aesthetic Project	15%

## **Academic Honesty**

As you know, plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses—and ones that I will prosecute pursuant to all University of Denver sanctions. ANY time you use another person's *words or ideas*, you **MUST** give them full credit, citing them accordingly. I am also aware of the numerous websites offering downloadable papers or encyclopedic entries on theatrical styles/eras/artists, as well as all reviews written by local critics regarding Denver area productions. Save yourself the trouble: the work in this course is tailored so that general-purpose writing just won't do, and I can spot a "fake" or cut-and-paste job all too well (and use Google to track it down). Using your classmates' work (with or without their permission) is, of course, also taboo, as is asking for a former student's work to copy *en toto* or borrow any part thereof. Do your own work, and I'll be happy to help out in any way that I can. Please do **NOT** join the sadly growing ranks of students who have been suspended/expelled for plagiarism or trying to cheat. If you are unsure as to what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please ask me and I will get you up to speed.

## **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Any student who feels (s)he may need an accommodation (e.g., a note-taker) based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the **Disability Services Program** (DSP) located on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Ruffatto Hall (1999 E. Evans Ave.) to coordinate reasonable accommodations for documented disabilities / medical issues. For more information, you can visit [www.du.edu/disability/dsp](http://www.du.edu/disability/dsp) or you can call the DSP at 303-871-2278 /2372 /7432.

## **COMMON SENSE DISCLAIMER**

Each year, the "Aesthetics" students have proven their originality and creativity in devising class exercises/projects. However, several of these endeavors have "run afoul" of Campus Security and other departments. The following things (for starters!) are therefore not allowed: any behavior that disrupts another class in progress (e.g., inside another building, beyond common areas, etc.); anything that potentially defaces or injures physical or natural structures (DU officials get cranky when we climb trees, paint walls, etc.); anything that involves the public and doesn't involve a final "disclaimer" about this being a performance (e.g., a fake missing person flyer, inciting a real riot, etc.). I'm sure I'm missing countless possibilities here, but the general rule is: when in doubt, ask ME before doing anything that might cross this boundary!

## **Gadget "Ban"**

Thanks to some of your less well-behaved cohorts in other classes, I'm afraid I've instated a "ban" on laptop computer use during lectures (because checking Facebook, surfing gossip sites, etc., is NOT acceptable class behavior at any time). It is crucial to the success of the course that you stay engaged during class, not clicking on a keyboard or buried in a laptop. Please check with me if you feel you need an exception to this rule. Rest assured, any PowerPoint slide used in lecture will be posted on Blackboard. You may also print it out beforehand, bring it to

class, and use it to take notes. Further, you may use your laptops for in-class project work and presentations. On a similar note, it goes without saying that cell-phone use, texting, etc., is also taboo, and that I reserve the right to confiscate your technology for the duration of class if you use it.

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### Accessing E-Reserve Articles

You can access the articles assigned for this course that are not in the Drain anthology through Blackboard as follows:

- ✓ Go to <http://blackboard.du.edu/> (and bookmark it!)
- ✓ Log on using your DU ID# (username) and Password
- ✓ Click on this class (THEA 1863) under “My Courses” on the right
- ✓ Click on the “Course Reserves” link in the box on the upper left
- ✓ You may be asked to agree to a © agreement the first time you sign on
- ✓ Scroll down to the title or author you want to view or print as a PDF

### ACCESSING VISUAL GALLERIES AND STREAMING VIDEOS

You can access the visual CourseMedia galleries used in class as well as videos assigned for discussion as follows (CourseMedia is also linked under “Web Sites” on Blackboard):

- ✓ Go to (and bookmark!) <https://coursemedia.du.edu/>
- ✓ Log in using your DU ID# and passcode
- ✓ You may be asked to agree to a © agreement the first time you sign on
- ✓ Find the “Aesthetics in Performance” Heading and Galleries (e.g. “Req. Movies/Class Clips,” “Movies with Style,” “ISMs,” “Musicals”)
- ✓ Click on the Gallery Box you wish to enter
- ✓ Click on the thumbnail of the image or video you wish to see (e.g. *Metropolis* or *Moulin Rouge*)
- ✓ I’m always adding to/refining galleries, so some things may shift a bit!

To watch streaming videos, you will need an Ethernet or broadband connection.

# **CLASS SCHEDULE**

\*Assignments are subject to change (as needed) with written OR verbal notice

## **Week 1: Beauty and Truth are in the eye of the beholder -- so what the heck is an "aesthetic"?!**

- Mon, 3/25 Introduction and Overview (Syllabus)  
Video clip assignment
- Wed, 3/27 What is an "aesthetic in performance"?  
What is "unique" about theatre?  
What is "good" and "bad" art/theatre? (Mnouchkine discussion)
- Fri, 3/29 Style and Substance (Types and Purposes of Theatre)  
Art vs. Entertainment – why binary?  
Can we apply alternate media/aesthetics to theatre?  
• *Bring <1 minute video clip of YOUR preferred aesthetic*

## **Week 2: All The World's A Stage -- But Not All Stages Are Equal?!**

- Mon, 4/1 Discuss Peter Brook's "Deadly Theatre" & "Holy Theatre"  
• *Bring contrasting pictures of "inspiring" and "boring"*
- Wed, 4/3 Discuss Brook's "Rough Theatre" & "Immediate Theatre"  
• *Bring contrasting pictures of "disturbing" and "calming"*
- Fri, 4/5 "Immediate Theatre" cont.  
Comedy vs. Tragedy (Genre?)  
What is REALISM (and Naturalism)?!  
• *Bring contrasting pictures of "order" and "chaos"*

## **Week 3: A Visual and Aural Aesthetic: Masks, Music, & Meter**

- Mon, 4/8 Masks in Performance: Greeks to Commedia to LeCoq  
• *Have read Hall's "The Greeks" (e-reserves)*  
• *Have read read Fo's "Wordless Speech" (e-reserves)*
- Wed, 4/10 Mask work cont.  
Verse Theatre & Dance Theatre
- Fri, 4/12 Musical Theatre Style/s  
• *Have read Warfield's "From Hair to Rent..." (e-reserves)*  
• *Have viewed a "new to you" musical for class (your choice!)*

## **Weeks 4-5: The Modernist Adventure – Divergent Searches for Truth and Change**

- Mon, 4/15 Symbolism & Expressionism  
• *Have read Drain 31-32 (Hasenclever)*  
• *Have read Maeterlinck's "The Tragical in Daily Life" (e-reserves)*

- Wed, 4/17     Futurism
- *Have read Drain 19-22; 173-174 (Marinetti)*
  - *Have viewed Metropolis for class (DU CourseMedia)*
- Fri, 4/19     No formal class – project work day
- Mon, 4/22     Dada & Surrealism
- *Present Symbolist/Expressionist and Futurist projects*
  - *Have read Drain 25-27 (Tzara); 28-30 (Apollinaire)*
  - *Have read Alexis's "A Visit to the Cabaret Dada" (e-reserves)*
- Wed, 4/24     Epic Theatre
- *Have read Drain 102-107; 112-117*
  - *Have viewed Zoot Suit for class (DU CourseMedia)*
- Fri, 4/26     No formal class – project work day

### **Week 6: Digging Even Deeper—It Hurts So Good!**

- Mon, 4/29     Theatre of Cruelty
- *Present Epic Theatre projects*
  - *Have read Drain 268-274 (Artaud)*
- Wed, 5/1     Existentialism & Absurdism
- *Have read Esslin's "[from] The Theatre of the Absurd" (e-reserves)*
  - *Have viewed Rockaby for class (DU CourseMedia)*
- Fri, 5/3     TBA (yes, we have class!)

### **Week 7: Physical and Material Realities – The Body and the Collective ...**

- Mon, 5/6     Physical Theatre: Meyerhold's Biomechanics and Viewpoints
- *Have read Drain 165-168 (Meyerhold)*
  - *Have read Herrington's "Directing with the Viewpoints" (e-reserves)*
- Wed, 5/8     Viewpoints cont.  
Ensembles / Social Change (Theatre of the Oppressed)
- *Have read Drain 108-109 (WTM); 335-339 (Boal)*
- Fri, 5/10     Social Change cont.

### **Week 8: And Now For Something Different—Blurring the Lines!**

- Mon, 5/13     Happenings and Performance Art
- *Have read Drain 56-58 (Kaprow)*
  - *Have read Carlson's "Performance Art" (e-reserves)*

Wed, 5/15     Happenings and Perf Art cont.

Fri, 5/17     No class

**Week 9: And Now Something *Completely* Different – Confounding Liveness & "Truth"?**

Mon, 5/20     Postmodernism and Multi-Media

- *Have read Drain 59-62 (Wilson)*
- *Have read Fortier's "Postmodern Theory" (e-reserves)*
- *Have viewed Moulin Rouge for class (DU CourseMedia)*

Wed, 5/22     Po-mo cont. and Cyber-Theatre

- *Bring contrasting pictures of "good" and "evil"*

Fri, 5/24     TBA (yes, we have class!)

- *Present Po-mo/Cyber/Multi-media conceptualization project*

**Mon, 5/27     MEMORIAL DAY – NO CLASS**

Wed, 5/29     Puppetry

- *Bring contrasting pictures of "love" and "hate" (YOUR aesthetic)*

Fri, 5/31     Rehearse Final Projects

**Mon, 6/3     PRESENTATION of Final Projects/Manifestos ("Art of the Theatre")**

*Have a Great Summer!!*

*I shall give you hunger and pain and sleepless nights,  
Also beauty and satisfaction known to few,  
And glimpses of heavenly life.  
None of these shall you have continually,  
And their comings and goings  
You shall not be foretold.*

*—Edwin Booth—*

*"On the god of all Arts Whispering to Actors"*

*I will love the light for it shows me the way,*

*Yet I will endure the darkness because it shows me the stars.*

*Og Mandino*

*American Essayist & Psychologist*