

# Theatre 1903

## Avant-Garde Theatre: Symbolism to Surrealism

Term: Spring 2015 Section #: 28451 Location: 1627 Time: Tues/Thurs 4:00 - 5:15pm	Instructor: Peter Wood email: pew16@pitt.edu cell phone: 347.416.4515 Office: 1612 Office Hours: Thursday, 1:00 - 3:30
---	---

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

From installation theatre like *Sleep No More* to the work of companies like Quantum Theatre, the Neo-Futurists, and the Wooster Group, there are many ways in which contemporary theatres experiment with form, structure, venue, and performance styles. This course will provide context and connections between contemporary experimental theatre and the historical avant-garde. We will examine the following movements: Symbolism, Expressionism, Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism. Looking at the theories and key texts associated with these movements, as well as their social and political moment in history, we will question how each movement impacted the theatre of the time, as well as what affects they may have on contemporary theatre. We will also question the presumptions and mythologies that have built up around each of the various avant-garde movements, looking at texts that argue for a greater understanding of how women participated in the avant-garde as well as the ways in which transnational theatrical practices impacted and influenced these movements that are often thought of only in terms of European men. Students will be expected to conduct research as well as create performances and other styles of art that reflect each of these avant-garde movements. The course will culminate in a research paper that bridges the historical avant-garde with contemporary experimental practices.

### OBJECTIVES

- To gain a familiarity with major historical theatrical avant-garde movements from the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries and their affects on theatre practices
- To examine how artistic provocations are embedded within cultural and social practices
- To experience each avant-garde movement from the perspective of an artist
- To question how the historical avant-garde has been represented & mythologized by theatre scholars

## REQUIRED BOOKS

*Symbolist Drama*, edited by Daniel Gerould  
*Expressionist Texts*, edited by Mel Gordon  
*Futurist Performance* by Michael Kirby & Victoria Nes Kirby  
*Dada Performance* by Mel Gordon  
*Theatre, Performance, and the Historical Avant-Garde* by Günter Berghaus

All other readings indicated in the weekly outline will be provided to students by the instructor.

## PROJECTS

### Manifesto (10% of grade)

The manifesto as a genre is inextricably tied to avant-garde movements. After reading several examples from various movements, the student will create their own manifesto that calls for provocation and new theatrical practices in order to save theatre from itself. While this must be a written manifesto, the manner and materials of its creation are up to the student. This will be due by the third week of class.

### Working Bibliography (15% of grade)

Each student will choose one avant-garde movement and create a bibliography of at least fifteen primary sources produced by or contemporaneous with the movement and at least fifteen secondary sources such as books or articles about that movement. This will be due on week nine.

### Artwork (30% of grade)

For each major movement, students will be expected to create a small piece of art that is done in the style of that particular avant-garde movement. The art does *not* need to be theatre necessarily, but if there is no performance element, the student will need to do a presentation of some kind about the artwork to the class. I would expect each project to reflect roughly 4-5 hours of work. Please note, these projects will end after week eight.

### Research Paper (30% of grade)

Students will identify an example of a production, theatre company, or playwright from between 1970 and today. They will write a research paper of *at least* 3500 words that demonstrates how their example uses or is influenced by historical avant-garde practices. They will also argue that their example is or is not a “provocation,” provide evidence for their argument, and provide a theory that explains why avant-garde practices can still be seen as provocations or, on the other hand, why they do *not* have

any power to provoke in contemporary society. This paper will be accomplished in three steps:

1. Proposal

The proposal will be a 500 - 750 word document that clearly identifies the work that the student has chosen as well as at least 2 examples of why they consider it to be avant-garde and what kind of provocation the work is attempting. This will be due by week eight.

2. Working Draft

This draft will have, at the very least, a fully written introduction and thesis statement, as well as at least seven pages of written work on other sections. Students will be expected to give a short presentation to the class on their work thus far, including the general outline of their argument and any research problems they are facing. These will be due and presented during week twelve.

3. Finished Draft

The finished draft of the paper will be due on the last day of final's week. However, any student wishing the opportunity to have a re-write option may do so if they turn it in to me by the *first day of the last week of classes*. Research papers will be graded on presentation (lack of spelling errors, typos, etc.), argument, and historical research.

## CLASS PARTICIPATION (15% OF GRADE)

Students should be in class, on time, and prepared. Students will complete all reading and homework for the day assigned. To fulfill our course's learning objectives, students should be prepared to participate in the following ways:

- be on time: lateness will count against your participation points
- offer thoughtful responses and/or raise pertinent questions
- contribute to the discussion
- answer questions and/or offer comments when called upon
- listen thoughtfully and respectfully to your peers
- participate as productive members in group activities
- complete in-class exercises

## ATTENDANCE

You will be allowed 2 absences without any penalty during the semester. Every other absence will lower your grade by 2%.

## EXPECTATIONS

What you can expect from me . . .

- I will create a respectful and supportive classroom.
- I will be fair and transparent in my grading.
- I will do my best to help each of you succeed in this class.

What I expect from you . . .

- You will respect your peers and help create a supportive and safe classroom.
- You will focus on the work and will not use cell phones or other devices to text, surf the web, or otherwise take your focus away during class.
- You will do your best to succeed.

## COURSE OUTLINE\*

### Week 1 - Course overview / Symbolism

Overview: We will discuss the overall structure of the course and the various projects and look at where the term “avant-garde” came from and how we understand it at both a description of a kind of art and as a series of historical movements. By reading a number of different avant-garde manifestos we will begin to get a sense of what each movement was trying to do and what it found artistically important. Following this, we will begin our section on Symbolism by reading two short plays and an introduction to the movement and I will provide some historical and cultural background.

Texts: *Avant-Garde Theatre* (Innes), 1-5 & 19-27  
Berghaus, 1-18  
A selection of manifestos

### Week 2 - Symbolism

Overview: We continue our examination of Symbolism by reading one of its most famous plays and further information on the movement. In addition, students will perform and/or present their Symbolist art works.

Plays: *The Intruder* by Maurice Maeterlinck  
*Pierrot: Assassin of His Wife* by Paul Marguerite  
*The Crystal Spider* by Madame Rachilde

Texts: Gerould, 7-33 & Berghaus, 18-54

### Week 3 - Expressionism, pre-War

Overview: I will provide some historical and cultural background to this German avant-garde movement which is split into two distinct styles: pre-WWI and post-WWI. This first week we will look at an example of a pre-WWI play as well as reading about the movement in general. Students will also share their own manifestos.

Plays: *Sancta Susanna* by August Stramm  
*Murderer Hope of Women* by Kokoschka  
Texts: *Expressionist Texts*, 7-26  
Berghaus, 55-90  
Due: Your manifesto

### Week 4 - Expressionism, post-War

Germany after WWI was a devastated nation and this has an impact on the few Expressionist playwrights. We will focus on one play as well as historical analysis. Students will perform/present their Expressionist art. We will also briefly address Expressionism's impact on film and view several excerpts.

Play: *Transfiguration* by Ernst Toller  
Texts: *German Expressionist Theatre: The Actor and the Stage* (Kuhns), selections TBD  
Film: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*

### Week 5 - Italian Futurism

Filippo Tomas Marinetti is widely accepted as the founder of Futurism and is, along with the movement as a whole, often tied to the political movement of Fascism. In this section, we will look at some of the historical and cultural influences on the movement as well as ways in which its association with Fascism is, perhaps, overstated. We will also look beyond Marinetti for an understanding of how different some of the Futurist artists were from each other.

Plays: *Futurist Performance*, 232-245  
Texts: *Futurist Performance*, Selections TBD  
Berghaus, 91-134

### Week 6 - Italian Futurism

Overview: We continue our examination of the relationships between Futurism and Fascism, as well as how the movement impacted theatre and the wide range of Futurist performance strategies. Students will perform/present their Futurist artwork.

Plays: *Futurist Performance*, 286-298  
Texts: *Futurist Performance*, 71-119 & 146-156  
*Futurism & Politics* (Berghaus), various sections.

### Week 7 - Dada

Overview: David Bowie is famous for using a “cut-up” technique for his songs where he writes his lyrics and then cuts them up and puts them back together in a more random fashion. He is consciously recalling Dadaist who often used this technique in their poetry. How does Dada reflect the madness of war and the relative security of those who created it? What does the movement offer to theatre and is there any lasting effects from this movement? We will explore these questions through the work of Dada’s most well known practitioner, Tristan Tzara as well as Mel Gordon’s overview of the movement.

Plays: *The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine*, *Fire Extinguisher* & other assorted plays.  
Texts: *Dada Performance*, 7-24 & 45-52  
Berghaus, 135-146

### Week 8 - Dada

Overview: We continue our examination of Dada, looking for evidence of Dada in contemporary performances and artistic strategies. Students will also perform/present their Dada artworks.

Plays: *Dada Performance*, Assorted Dada Plays  
Texts: Berghaus, 146–180

### Week 9 - Surrealism

Overview: Surrealism never had quite the same direct mark on theatre as it did on literature and painting, however the ways in which its basic tenets have influenced theatre are profound. This week examines the origin point of the movement as well as Andre Breton’s influence over the movement starting in 1924. Questions will include what challenges does the theatre present to making true surrealist art as well as they ways in which the surrealist manifestos remain, in some ways, completely accepted and unquestioned by many artists.

Plays: *The Breasts of Tiresias* by Guillaume Apollinaire  
“Spurt of Blood” by Artaud  
Texts: *Manifestos of Surrealism*, selections  
*The Surrealist Connections: An Approach to a Surrealist Aesthetic of Theatre*, selections tbd

Film: *Un Chien Andalou*

### Week 10 - Role of Women in "Isms"

Overview: This week we focus on the role of women in the avant-garde movements studied so far and question whether the official histories and accounts of these movements represent the whole truth of the matter. If women have been excluded from these histories, why? How does reclaiming some of these women's stories and artwork change our perception of the movement? We take some time to discuss the work of Gertrude Stein and the ways in which she was both part of and separate from the movements we have previously examined.

Play: *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights*

Texts: *The Women Artists of Italian Futurism*: selections TBD

Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*: selections

### Week 11 - Theories & Challenges

Overview: The following two weeks will be spent asking how the very notion of the avant-garde might be questioned and expanded or, depending on your point of view, destroyed all together, especially for contemporary performances. Who gets into the "avant-garde" club and why? What is the difference between "avant-garde" and "experimental." Do these categories matter? If they do, why and how? Students will be expected to bring some of their own research on contemporary theatre to the discussion.

Texts: *Not the Other Avant-Garde*: Introduction

*Not the Other Avant-Garde*: "Cutting Edge to Rough Edges: On the Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance"

### Week 12 - Working Draft Presentations

Overview: Students will present their research to date and discuss where they hope to go with their research paper.

### Week 13 - Theories & Challenges

Texts: *Not the Other Avant-Garde*: "The Politics of Embodiment in Prewar Avant-garde Theater in Japan"

*Not the Other Avant-Garde*: "Avant-Garde Drama in the Middle East"

*Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism*, selections

### Week 14 - Avant-Garde in the Here & Now & Course Conclusion

Overview: This week we will discuss how our new understanding of the historical avant-garde informs our understanding of contemporary experimental and avant-garde theatre practices. We will also revisit the manifestos written at the beginning of

the semester and draft, as a class, a manifesto for the next avant-garde theatre movement.

\* Please note, reading assignments and movie selections may change at the instructor's discretion based on the needs of the class. Any changes will be discussed with the class and students given notice of at least one week.

## **DIVERSITY CLAUSE**

All participants of this class, both students and instructors, are required to help promote and maintain, at all times, a positive atmosphere in which everyone displays and receives respect, tolerance, and encouragement regardless of race, gender, religion, age, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic background.

## **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. Plagiarism, copying of assignments, and cheating will not be tolerated. Violating the University-wide policy on academic honesty will result in automatic failure on the assignment and possible failure of the course. A copy of the university's policy statement is available at <http://www.as.pitt.edu/faculty/policy/integrity.html>.

## **SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS**

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, please notify both the instructor and Disability Resources and Services no later than the second week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call 648-7890 (Voice or TDD) to schedule your an appointment. The office is located in 216 William Pitt Union and the website is [www.drs.pitt.edu](http://www.drs.pitt.edu). This information is confidential and the instructor may not discuss it in the class unless you choose to do so.

## **THEATRE ARTS DEPARTMENT MEDIA STATEMENT**

In accordance with "The Pitt Promise: A Commitment to Civility," The University of Pittsburgh Student Code of Conduct, and the professional standards and expectations of our field, students, staff and faculty in the Theatre Arts



Department agree to the positive, responsible and respectful use of social media. The Theatre Arts Department's commitment to civility includes zero tolerance for public aspersion upon students, classes, facilities; the un-approved posting of production videos or photos, per Equity guidelines; cyber bullying. Any member of the university community may file a complaint in accordance with the Student Code of Conduct. The Student Code of Conduct and its procedures can be accessed here: <http://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/studentconduct>. The Pitt Promise may be accessed here: <http://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/pittpromise>.

## **THEATRE ARTS DEPARTMENT CASTING STATEMENT & MAINSTAGE AND LAB SEASON MISSION**

We are committed to producing stories from multiple cultural perspectives, of diverse styles and structures and from multiple time periods.

To tell every story upon our stage, students and artists of all abilities, races, genders, sexualities, nationalities, and religions are needed for our casts, our crew, and our production teams.

As a department, we are committed to analyzing and understanding a playwright's intentions for location, time and character. We are equally committed to challenging ourselves to think beyond the strictures of given circumstances and historical expectations in production.

We are committing to cultivating within our students and faculty a space for artists who are willing to take risks, to stretch themselves and to see each class, audition and production opportunity as a fresh opportunity for greatness.