Course Title: Site-Specific Performance: Art, Activism, and Public Space
Course Number: ARTS-UG 1080-001   Gallatin School, New York University FA11
Course Day: Thursdays 9:30-12:15 Location: 7 East 12th Street LL21
Course Instructor: Martha Bowers   Office Hours: TH 5 pm-7pm
Office: 613 1 Wash Place Ext. 87340
Email: mb155@nyu.edu   Cell: 718 809-8030

“…democracy is founded on public space that should be, essentially empty. This emptiness does not belong to any individual or group, but should be available to anyone who can bring meaning to it, recognize others in it, and instigate and perpetuate dissemination and debate about rights.”

Artist Krzysztof Wodiczko on Claude Lefort’s theory of democracy.

This is a studio course that will introduce you to various aesthetic strategies used to create site-specific performance/art works. Through a series of progressive exercises, using different artistic mediums, you will use variety of structures to create site-specific studies in an ever widening scope. We will begin with ourselves as a site, expand to our classroom, our associated communities and the public and private spaces that comprise our urban environment. Along the way we will be exploring what skills and tools we have and need to acquire to develop as artists working in this field. The course will culminate in the creation of proposals for larger scale hypothetical site-specific works to allow to you to expand your imaginations outside the limits of the course and learn the basics of writing grant proposals to fund such projects.

The course will also include reading about and viewing documentation of site work by seminal artists in this field as well as a limited number of critical writing assignments to develop our thinking about the aesthetics and politics embedded in site practice. We will be exploring core inquiries into the intent of site work, the latent meaning embedded in place/space, the nature of audience/performer relationships, the ethics involved in artist/community interactions and the ways in which site works function as a forms of activism.

"Site-specific" is a term frequently associated with the visual arts but since the Happenings of the 60's and 70's, a body of work termed "site-specific performance" has evolved as highly structured works of art that are designed around, for or because of place. In the streets, in fields, deserts, forests, garbage dumps, abandoned buildings, on the border, aboard boats, in virtual space and outer space, this genre has unleashed the power of performance to indelibly mark our sense of locational identity and investigate notions of space/place/non-place. As site artists confront the matrix of social forces and overlapping communities that relate to a given site, their aesthetics, creative processes, forms and goals have shifted. How are they blurring the lines between art and activism, art and urban renewal, art and spirituality, art and real life? These are some of the questions we’ll explore through our practice in making site work and through in-class discussions.
Requirements

Attendance and Participation: Any unexcused absences may lower your grade. This class is both experiential in nature and will require your regular attendance and invested participation in class activities, and rehearsals outside of class as well scholarly investigations into the social theories and issues that underlie the practice. Please come to each class having done any required work on assigned site studies, readings and writing assignments- and prepared to participate in “on your feet” class activities as well as in discussions. Late arrival (more than 15 min.) will count as half an absence.

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you should contact me to arrange an appointment as soon as possible. At the appointment we can discuss the course format, anticipate your needs, and explore potential accommodations. I rely on the Center for Students with Disabilities for assistance in verifying the need for accommodations and developing accommodation strategies. If you have not previously contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities, I encourage you to do so.

Late Assignments: Late assignments, as a rule, will not be permitted. Only in extraordinary circumstances will late assignments be accepted. Late assignments may be accepted at the discretion of the instructor, but may be given a reduced grade.

Assignments: Promptness in completing class assignments and required readings is a requirement. However, circumstances may arise which make it impossible to complete class requirements on time. When such circumstances occur, appropriate arrangements must be made in advance whenever possible. You are expected to have prepared thoroughly for each class. Preparing site studies as per schedule is a requirement. Preparation also includes any outside rehearsal or preparation to prepare site studies individually or in groups, reading the assigned readings prior to class, summarizing the content and being prepared to discuss it; listing questions or reactions to the material; and making connections between concepts in readings, videos we view and your own artistic practice. Print out readings and bring to class or have them available on your laptop during class.

Readings and other assignments are listed in a box below date they are assigned and should be completed by next class meeting unless otherwise stipulated. Writing assignments will include two 2-3 page response papers and a final proposal for a hypothetical site-specific work. Details of assignments to be discussed in class. You can expect to have approximately 4-5 hrs of work outside of class time each week.

Syllabus in Detail

Thursday 9/8 Introduction to Site-Specific Performance/Art
Introduction to the field. Introductions to each other via in-class exercises; theatre-based explorations of locational identity; introduction to use of performance scores.

**Thursday 9/15 Reading a Site: Colliding Scores**
Learning how to look deeply at the latent meaning in place/space and using what naturally occurs as basis for mediating viewers’ perception of a site. In class, create short pieces that use naturally occurring movement and text in classroom or adjacent space and alter through time, space and scale.


**Thursday 9/22 Walking the City: Performance as Experience**
Discuss readings. Apply what we have learned about reading a site and the use of performance scores. Introduction to the “mediated walk” as a form of site practice. Details discussed in class. Special Guest: Mary Ellen Strom

**Assignment:** Due 9/29 Create a performance score, that directs and designs a designated walk for a classmate. Email them their score to perform before next class. (You should do it yourself and make sure it takes under an hour to perform.) Hand in a hard copy of the score. Start scouting a site for your next assignment- making an audio tour of a site. (See assignment below.) Reading: Oddey, Allison. “Narratives of the City.” pp. 133-161, “The Art of Sound.” pp 162-192. *Reframing the Theatrical.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

**Thursday 9/29 Walking the City: Interventions**
Reflect on Walking the City assignment. Hand in hard copy of your score View documentation of audio walks by Teri Rueb and Janet Cardiff. Discuss Oddey reading. Discussion of upcoming assignment.

**Assignment:** Due 10/6 Create a short audio score to guide the listener on a walk. Details to be discussed in class. You can choose to do this as team with another student or do it individually. Technology used can be an ipod with a recorded track (using Garage Band or other program to edit) that includes voice, music, breath, sounds or if you do not have access to this equipment or some basic knowledge of these programs then plan to use a cell phone and create an audio score you can direct in real time from your phone, but I encourage you to explore expanding your technical skills. As these audio files are large, please find means of exchanging files that do not require emailing, i.e. meet to transfer files from your computer to the listeners’ ipods or find other solutions. If work in a team-exchange your track with both members of the other team. Do the audio tour you receive before next class. Please put the audio file you created on a CD and hand in to me. Make sure to label your disc with your name(s), title of assignment and of piece. If you must use a cell phone, write up the text you will be speaking.

Thursday 10/6 Community Voice
Reflect on audio tours. Hand in CD’s.
Read out loud scripts and/or view performances of scripts artists have developed using community voices: Anna Deveare Smith, Sojourn Theatre, Ping Chong, Marty Pottenger, Suzanne Lacy Note different roles artists have played in shaping the public presentation of these voices and the ethics involved. Graffitti critical issues of our time. Introduction to Boal Image Theatre to identify issues of importance to class. Form affinity groups, identify issue and interviewees. Role Play interviews.

Assignment: Due 10/13: Record an interview with someone who has a point of view and experience related to the issue your group is investigating. Transcribe, email to your team members and at least one member of each group should bring their laptop to next class. Reading: Site Dance, edited by Melanie Kloetzel and Carolyn Pavlik, Chapter 14 pp.268-289.

Thursday 10/13 Site as Metaphor: Staging Community Scripts
Time in class to collage and edit your community scripts. Read excerpts of community scripts in class for feedback. Discuss use of site as an active agent and/or metaphor in site-specific performance/art. View Whisper the Waves, Dream Life of Bricks.

Assignment: Due: 10/20: Meet with your group outside of class, choose a site public enough you can perform this script. Create a physical score then add the text. Consider how the metaphoric content of the site and its material qualities add context to your script. Please make sure your selected site is a short walk from classroom- max 10 minutes. Email me the selected location for your performance by Sunday 10/16. No reading assignment. Work on your performance. Hand in one hard copy of script at next class. If it rains, scripts will be performed in class.

Thursday 10/20 Site-Specific Performances of Community Scripts
Travel to sites to view performances. Return to classroom to discuss. Mid-term check-in. Hand in hard copy of script. Where have you felt limited by lack of skills, knowledge, tools or models?

Thursday 10/27 Performance as Protest
View Las Madres, Act Up, Tank Man, clips of Tahrir Square: Notice and analyze how these protesters use both the metaphoric content of site and aesthetic tools to increase the power of their actions.

Writing Assignment: Due 11/3: 3 pages, double spaced: Choose one of the above protests, or another of your choice (i.e. Rosa Parks and the bus boycott, or other protests from the Civil Rights movement, Thousand Coffins Anti War protest or a more contemporary protest) Research. Introduce the issue and the group organizing the protest, describe the intent of the protest. Describe and analyze what aesthetic tools were used and to what end. What role did the site play? What strategies were organizers using to achieve their purpose? How did this protest redefine public space? What was the significance of their choice of sites? Read as necessary to research your topic. Include a separate bibliography of sources you used as research and cite them in your paper.

Thursday 11/3 Radical Ridicule: Contemporary Aesthetic Protest Strategies
Introduce work of Larry Bogad, The Yes Men, Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping, Billionaires for Bush, Flash Mobs


Thursday 11/10 Subversive Images: Visual Art and Media Tools
Present readings.
View and discuss works by Krzysztof Wodiczko, Alfredo Jaar, Gran Fury

Assignment: Due 11/17: Experiment with creating alternative images and signage. Using what we have learned about looking at what is already in a site, create at least one image or piece of signage that mimics design elements of existing signage/image but interrupts or changes the message. Create a visual piece that you can bring to class- a photograph, drawing, Photoshop redesign. Writing: 3 page response paper on one of Phillips’ essays, Discuss the aesthetic strategies a given artist uses to disrupt and/or subvert the dominant cultural perspective in a given set of images/visual symbols and signs. How are they using a familiar semiotic code and subverting its message through a substitution or palimpsest of their own devising?

Thursday 11/17 Beauty and Spectacle
View signage and/or image projects.
View Summer in Ivey, Safe Harbor, Royal DeLuxe Discuss role of beauty and spectacle as end in and of themselves and as subversive strategies.
Reflect and discuss final projects.
**Assignment:** Due 12/1: Think about what you’d like to propose as a final project. Write a paragraph as a pitch you will present to class describing a hypothetical project you’d like to create. These can be purely aesthetic site projects, or can have activist agendas. Address your aesthetic strategy and elements, the structure of the project and your intention.

**11/24 No Class. Happy Thanksgiving!**

**Thursday 12/1 Proposals for Final Site Projects**
Bring in your paragraphs and make your pitch to class. Form groups. Discuss format of proposal. Look at sample proposals and budget template, discuss research to be done.

**Assignment:** Due 12/15: Work on your final project.

**Thursday 12/8 Brainstorming with class on final site-specific projects.**
Each team will present where they are and facilitate a brainstorm with class. Introduction to Lerman’s Critical Response protocols.

**Assignment:** Finish your proposal and create presentation for next class. These can include staged readings of sample scripts, PowerPoint presentations of images, and/or short videos or audio tracks. Please bring in copies (enough copies for all of us) that include narrative (see handouts that have questions to be addressed, length of narrative and a budget template). Please make these as engaging as possible not just dry readings of narrative. We will be acting as a grant panel and ask you questions. Details as to length allocated to each group to be discussed in class but plan to keep your presentation under 10 min.

**Tuesday 12/15 Last Class: Presentations of Final Projects**
In class presentations. Reflection on course. Course evaluation forms.

Grades are based on:

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<tr>
<td>Audio Score</td>
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<td>Community-based script</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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| Final Hypothetical Site Proposal                  | 30     |
| Writing Assignments                               | 20     |
| Class Participation                               | 10     |
| **Total**                                        | 100    |

**Grading Equivalence:**
A=93 and above; A-=90-92; B+=87-89; B=83-86; B-=80-82; C+=77-79; C=73-76; C-=70-72; F=below 70
Plagiarism
NYU has strict regulations regarding plagiarism. If you have any questions as to what constitutes plagiarism, please ask me or visit this website for useful information. http://webster.commnet.edu/mla/plagiarism.shtml

Incompletes: Only in extreme circumstances should students consider not completing course work and taking a grade of Incomplete. If such circumstances arise that course work cannot be completed in a timely fashion, and a student wishes to take an Incomplete, this must be discussed and approved by course instructor prior to end of course and a specific timetable agreed upon for completion of course work.

Additional Readings and Viewings: Are either now or will be on Blackboard in Folder: Assignments/Additional Readings (These will not be covered in class but are provided should you want to read more deeply about various aspects of this field or view more artists’ works. If there is a specific area you wish do more research on, contact me. I’ll suggest or post other readings)