NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study

Course Title: Site-Specific Performance: Art, Activism, and Public Space
Course Number: ARTS-UG 1080-001 FA15
Course Day: Thursdays 9:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m.
Classroom location: ARC RM:LL02
Instructor Name: Martha Bowers Email: mb155@nyu.edu
Office Location: TBD Office Hours: TH 8:30-9:30 am or 12:15-1:15 pm

Physical spaces tell stories. Every place inhabited by human beings is infused with narrative. The spaces we move through in our daily life are constantly telling us stories about “how to behave” or “who we are” within that space. They speak to us. Soothe us. Even yell at us. The stories that are told by the spaces that surround us shape us just as much as we shape them. It is in this dialogue—of creating space and it creating us—that we become who we are and who we hope to be.

Gan Golan, excerpt from essay “A space for new stories”

Beyond Zuccotti Park

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 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 your own site-specific works which can be hypothetical proposals, further developments of studies you have created earlier in the course or new short works that the class will travel to view.

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.

**Goals:** To acquire a broad-based understanding of the historical, sociological, and aesthetic knowledge of socially engaged artistic practices within the field of contemporary site-specific performance/art. To develop the imagination, flexibility, and multifaceted thinking necessary for success as artists responsive to contemporary social and environmental conditions.

**Objectives:**
Through response papers to critical readings, class discussions in response to viewings of seminal works and reflections on guest lecturers/site-specific practitioners visits, evidence an understanding of the history and evolution of the field of site-specific performance/art.

Participate in class exercises and trainings designed to enhance artistic skills and apply these acquired skills to the creations of site-specific performance/art studies in several artistic mediums.

Demonstrate the ability to think creatively, work collaboratively and problem solve as part of the creative process.

Learn about different research strategies and employ them as part of the creative process-as evidenced in creative work.

Develop sophisticated, original and doable concepts for site-specific performance/art projects with clear objectives as evidenced in final site-specific performance/art project presentations.

**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. Have readings 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. There is also a Summary of Readings and Assignments in Resources folder with specific instructions for all Writing Assignments. Writing assignments will include written responses to readings, classmates’ site studies, and to a SoundWalk, as well as a proposal for your final site-specific work. Site studies will include a performance score for a site around NYU, an audio tour, the short piece created for a common space, and a final site-specific project. 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

Week 1
Thursday 9/3 Introduction to Site-Specific Performance/Art
Performative explorations of locational identity; introduction to use of performance scores. Creative community building. Ai Weiwei

Bring your phone and earbuds/headphones to next class.

Week 2
Thursday 9/10 Reading a Site: Public Space, Public Sphere
Meet at 60 Wall Street. Tour of POPS spaces, public spaces and city parks. Return to classroom to discuss readings and performance scores.

Writing Assignment: Response Paper #1 on Ferdman article-see directions in Summary of Readings and Assignments. Research POPS.

Week 3
Thursday 9/17 Black Gotham Walking Tour
Tour of Wall Street area from Black historical perspective with kamau ware. Will email details as to where to meet.

Assignment: Create a performance score for a specific site of your choice but within a 10 minute walk of NYU. Bring hard copy printout of it to next class for a classmate to do.

Week 4
Thursday 9/24 Site-Specific Sound Works
Exchange and do partners performance scores. Discuss reading. Listen to Janet Cardiff. Ant Hampton, Tim Etchell’s Library: The Quiet Volume: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wfg9e0p5UA

Assignment: Due 10/1:
Purchase Soundwalk tour and download to your phone, ipod, or ipad. http://www.soundwalk.com/#/TOURS/ Choose a tour and do it before next class.
Write a 2 page response. Analyze the aesthetic elements used in the audio score: sound effects, narration, and character. What devices does the narrator use to guide the listener? What research is evident? What role does the narrator play? How does this audio tour change your experience of a specific site?

Start to identify an area/site for your own audio tour. You can choose to do this with partner or do it individually. Begin to do research and develop an aesthetic concept for your piece. Technology used can be an ipod, iphone, MAC laptop and edit using Garage Band or other program like Protools or Audacity if you are familiar with those. Please upload final audio file to NYU Classes. Make sure to label your audio file with your name(s), title of assignment. If the technical requirements of this assignment are a challenge, please see me. Not everyone has access to the appropriate equipment but we can problem solve. Final Audio Tour due 10/15.

Reading: Ferdman, Bertie. “Blurring the Lines.”

Week 5
Thursday 10/1 Site-Specific Walks: Audio Tours Training
Guest in to train on audio recording and editing.
Discuss Soundwalk tours and details of audio tour assignment. Discuss readings.

Assignment: Due 10/15: Work on your audio tour. Upload to NYU Classes site by 10/15
Required: Attend En Garde Arts event Hudson River Park Oct 2-4, or Dance on the Greenway Sat Oct 3rd at IKEA in Red Hook, Brooklyn Details at www.dtetc.org

Week 6
Thursday 10/8 Models and Aesthetic Strategies
Meet in classroom. Discuss reading and site works seen at Dance on the Greenway, or En Garde Arts BOSSS event. In class viewing of Wodizcko, Natalie Bookchin, Angels and Accordions.
Weather permitting, we’ll go to Wash Park and workshop some techniques for devising site-specific performances.

Assignment: Due: 10/15: Finish Audio Tour and upload to NYU Classes.
Another site-specific event: Art in Odd Places Festival Oct 7-11 along 14th Street. Google for details.

Week 7
Thursday 10/15 Trip to Green-Wood Cemetery:
Meet at 9:45 at Green-Wood gate. Take the R train going towards Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. Exit at the 25th Street station. Walk east one block to Green-Wood at 5th Avenue and 25th Street.
Assign partners to do audio tours.

Week 8
Thursday 10/22 Site-Specific Performance & Activism
Discuss how site-specific works have functioned as activism, the various intentions of site artists and their aesthetic strategies. View Lola Arias, Suzanne Lacy- The Roof is on Fire
Graffiti critical issues of our time.
Discuss audio tours. Divide into groups to present readings for next week.
Mid-term check-in. Where have you felt limited by lack of skills, knowledge, tools or models? Review Final Project directions and discuss.

Assignment: Due 10/29: Activist Art: Forms and Examples in NYU

Week 9
Thursday 10/29 Transgression to Occupation: Site-Specific Performance as Activism
Guest: Monica Hunken Pending Availability
Groups present readings.
Discussion with guest artist.

Assignment: Due 11/5: Think about a work you could create for a common space: a bench, an elevator, a phone booth, a loading dock, a door or a classroom. Develop a concept. Time in class to workshop next week in teams. For other examples of activist art we may not have gotten to in past class, Google The Yes Men, Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping, and Pussy Riot.

Week 10
Thursday 11/5 Site Studies for Common Spaces
View Common Dances by Shannon Hummel
In class, in teams create a short site study for a “common space.”
Discuss final projects.

**Week 11**  
**Thursday 11/12 The Host and the Ghost: Site-specific performance and historical narratives.** How have site works played a role in redefining urban and rural spaces? Discuss reading. View Joanna Haigood’s *Invisible Wings*, Ann Carlson and Mary Ellen Strom’s *Geyserland*, Bowers’ *Dream Life of Bricks*, Krzysztof Wodiczko- projections.

Discuss and summarize some of the models of site-specific works we have explored. Present final project ideas and create teams.

http://www.3rdringout.com/about/project/

**Week 12**  
**Thursday 11/19 Final Project Development**  
Time in class to work on final projects. Make final decisions as to whether you want to form teams or work individually. Brainstorm with class. Schedule final project showings/presentations. View and discuss community-based site-specific projects: *Cry You One* and *The Penelope Project*

**Assignment:** Due 12/3: Continue to develop your final site projects. Read, research and rehearse as needed to further develop. Document your research. Work on the written proposal for your final project due 12/3. See Final Project Guidelines.

**11/26 No Class. Happy Thanksgiving!**

**Week 13**  
**Thursday 12/3 Final Project Development**  
If time: view *Royal De Luxe* Discuss role of beauty and spectacle as end in and of themselves and as subversive strategies.

**Assignment:** Due 12/10 Continue work on final projects.

**Week 14**  
**Thursday 12/10 Final Project Final Showings**
In class presentations. Reflection on course. Course evaluation forms.

Grades are based on:
Site Studies
  Performance Scores  10%
  Audio Tour  15%
  Small studies for common spaces  15%
Final Project  35%
Writing Assignments  10%
Class Participation  15%
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%

**Academic Integrity:** "As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html )"

**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.