

Louisiana State University, Department of Communication Studies
CMST 4142: Topics In Performance Studies
Performing Installation Art
Fall 2018, TTH 1:30-2:50 pm, Coates 137

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Course Description and Goals

You enter an art gallery and walk into a thick mist that keeps changing color—where are the paintings? All you see are other spectators emerging in the mist and peering back at you. In another gallery it appears you are peeking into the apartment of a man who has recently catapulted himself out of the window, and like a detective, you try to decipher the clues for this strange action he has left behind. Visiting Berlin, you come around a corner to see the *Reichstag*, the immense government building from which at one time Hitler made speeches before massive crowds, completely wrapped in white cloth. In a science museum while you are studying a display about a rare kind of bat called a “piercing devil” that has only ever been directly observed by luring it into a thick wall made of lead, you have the growing suspicion that something is not quite right here—that the museum may in fact be lying to you or making up bizarre facts....is there any such a thing as a “piercing devil”? You look around you at other spectators and try to gauge what kinds of reactions they are having. What the heck is happening here?

Installation art—a name given to a wide variety of artistic and performance forms—immerses the spectator such that s/he becomes in effect the “hero” and subject of the performance. Installation artists often “de-familiarize” our expectations or our everyday experiences; sometimes they create alternative immersive worlds; sometimes they intervene in specific already-existing sites; sometimes they do these things to critique the status quo or merely to awaken something in us that might best be described as *wonder*.

This course will introduce you to various methods, goals, and histories of installation art practice, with specific attention to how installation artists communicate, and on how they employ and engage performance. What is installation? What are its qualities, methods, purposes, and subgenres? What and how does it communicate to its spectators? How have critics and artists defined it? What is its history or genealogy? What theories inform its practices and its critics? How do its variations with elements such as participatory spectatorship and site-specificity work? We will investigate these questions by reading about them and discussing them, but most crucially we will explore them in the active mode: much of the course will take the form of workshops and projects in which we will create and document our own installation art performances.

By the end of this course you should:

- 1) Be acquainted with the critical and aesthetic concepts that inform how installation art communicates
- 2) Be able to appreciate installation more fully and deeply as a spectator/critic
- 3) Be able to situate installation practices in pertinent historical artistic and/or performance schools, periods, and methods
- 4) Have gained experience as an installation artist yourself, developing an array of alternative strategies for communicating with visual and interactive technologies and for approaching the creative process that can also be applicable to contexts and projects beyond this course.

In order to achieve these goals, you will need to commit fully to the experiments, the materials, and one another.

Communication Intensive Course

This is a certified Communication-Intensive (C-I) course which meets all of the requirements set forth by LSU's Communication across the Curriculum program, including

- Instruction and assignments emphasizing informal and formal visual and technological communication
- Teaching of discipline-specific communication techniques;
- Use of feedback loops for learning;
- Practice of ethical and professional work standards;
- 40% of the course grade rooted in communication-based work; and
- Practice of ethical and professional work standards.

Students interested in pursuing the LSU Distinguished Communicators certification may use this C-I course for credit. For more information about this student recognition program, visit www.cxc.lsu.edu.

Required Texts (ordered at campus bookstore)

Bishop, Claire. *Installation Art*. Routledge 2005.

Sholette, Gregor et al. *The Interventionists: Users' Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life*. MASS MoCA 2006.

Smith, Keri. *The Guerilla Art Kit*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press 2007.

Weschler, Lawrence. *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder*. Vintage 1995.

Note: The first 2 texts above have gone out of print. I have added pdf files of the Bishop text to our course Moodle. There are still some new and used copies available on ABE and Amazon.

This list may be supplemented with materials distributed via Moodle. Some will be for all; some will be just for the graduate students. Please make sure your MyLSU account is working and that this course is published on your Moodle desktop. If you are absent when any materials are assigned, distributed, or presented, you are still responsible for obtaining them, getting notes from a classmate, and for completing all assignments on time. You will also need various mixed media and found materials for projects. Most of this can be scavenged or purchased quite cheaply. You are also encouraged to use resources in the HopKins Black Box and Studio 151.

Course Requirements, Responsibilities, and Policies

Preparation, Participation, Citizenship, and Attendance: This course relies heavily upon your full and active participation. *In fact, participation, as we shall discover, is one of the major tropes of installation art.* In order to participate fully and as a good citizen in our discussions and workshops, you need to attend regularly and come prepared: read and digest the assigned texts and be prepared to engage them on the days stipulated, prepare short assignments and projects as assigned and on time, and fulfill your role as spectator/participant in your classmates' performances.

Planned absences: if you know you are going to miss a class for an official LSU activity you should meet with me to work out how to do any work that is due **in advance** and to strategize so that you mitigate the effects of missing class. It's your responsibility to initiate and follow through on this.

Missing class will affect your grade. Everyone has 3 absences to use, no questions asked (however, if you are scheduled to present work and miss that class, you will fail that assignment). You should save these for real problems like an illness or emergency. Absences after those 3 begin to dig into your grade with a deduction of 40 points from your attendance and participation grade—a precipitous decline. Absences do not excuse you from required assignments. It's your responsibility to initiate and follow through on making up work due to excused absences.

Accommodation: If you have a disability that may have some impact upon your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see a Coordinator in the Office for Disability Affairs so that such accommodations may be arranged. After you receive your accommodation letters, please **meet with me** during the first two weeks of class to discuss the provisions of those accommodations. *If you provide me with an accommodation letter it is your responsibility to follow through with a meeting with me.*

Assignments Evaluation, and Grading Scale: Your grade is up to you to earn. There are ten ways to earn points in this class, spelled out below. Your cumulative total will determine your grade as follows:
967-1000 = A+; 933-966 = A; 900-932 = A-; 867-899 = B+; 833-866 = B; 800-832 = B-; 767-799 = C+; 733-766 = C; 700-732 = C-; 667-699 = D+; 633-666 = D; 600-632 = D-; 0-599 = F

I) Attendance, Preparation and Participation, 200 points: For most of our class sessions, you will have a chance to earn participation points via your preparation for and contributions to workshop and/or discussion, short in-class or prepared assignments, short presentations, and/or “mini-performances” prepared for or made during class. These are not necessarily marked on the syllabus since they are assigned in part in reaction to what you are doing in class. They cannot be made up since by their nature they involve being present, but note that merely being present won't earn points; you will need to prepare and participate. Keep up with the class and you will do well here—and that should overflow into all the rest of the assignments. Also note how these points may be affected by attendance as described above.

2) Artist Presentations, 100 points: Each of you will research the work of 2 or 3 specific installation artists, theorists (often one person is both), significant shows, movements, installation sites, or groups of artists and present your findings to the class. Most of these can be researched on the Internet; some are covered in the course texts. I will provide a list of subjects from which to choose, or I may choose the artists for you, by design or by chance. One goal of this assignment is to give us all a sense of the wide variety of practices that installation incorporates as well as some highlights of its history. Another is to provide us with a shared body of reference, since most of you will not have seen many works of installation art in person. For this assignment you will provide a Power Point or Prezi or video essay plus a 2-page summary of your research on each figure; we will assemble these into a class collection. You will be tested over your classmates' presentations. Be very sure to cite all your sources.

3) – 6) Three short tests, 300 points or 100 points each: Tests will be a mix of objective questions and short writings, for instance definitions or responses to performances. These will focus on developing a vocabulary of critical terms and concepts and knowledge of the history surrounding the performance of installation art, as well as responses to the texts and works we encounter in class.

7)-10) Four Projects, 400 points (100 points each): You will complete these projects during the semester; specific requirements for each will be discussed in detail in class. Some projects may be group projects; I will reserve deciding if this will be the case until I see how you are working. Projects will require steps along the way and progress checks as well as workshops so you get feedback as you develop your work. Being prepared for the steps will count as part of your grade. *Each project requires the submission of an accompanying written artist's statement (1-2 pages) describing its goals and methods, and using terms and concepts from our readings and discussions.* Written statements are always individual work. Additionally, you may be asked to respond to works presented by your peers. When this is the case, your responses count in your participation grade, and they may impact your project grade as well. The projects are:

Cornell Box/Self in Miniature: This project draws inspiration from Joseph Cornell's mixed media boxes and will require you to make your own miniature installation "Cornell Box" using found objects.

Jee Young Box Blow Up: You'll adapt your Cornell Box to life-scale. This project is inspired in part by Korean artist Jee Young.

Guerilla Art Installation: Using the *Guerilla Art Kit* and *Interventionists* texts for inspiration, you will conceive and execute an off-site guerilla installation. You will let us know when and where it will be, but you must also document this project and present your documentation to the class when we discuss the projects; part of the assignment here is how to document ephemeral works. Please note that due to the nature of using off-site, public space, our class may need to meet outside of regular time for these assignments. We will work it out together.

Cabinet of Wonder/video installation: Inspired by works of video installation artists we will study as well as the Weschler text and the Museum of Jurassic Technology, you will build a video or mixed media installation as part of a class "meta-museum." As in MJT, this installation should focus on activating the spectator by defamiliarizing an institution or set of institutionalized conventions. Selected works from this "museum" may be installed for public presentation at the HBB fall showcase.

Graduate Students enrolled in this course should expect to read additional texts and teach the entire class concepts from those readings. We will discuss this requirement further in class. In addition, you will be asked to write more detailed critical responses to works presented in class in lieu of or as supplements to the tests.

Policies

All performance and writing assignments will be discussed in detail in class. *Any work that earns points in this class must be submitted on the day stipulated in order to earn points, and cannot be made up. Late work may be subject to automatic reductions, with a very steep fall-off rate.*

All written work must be typed, double-spaced, in a standard 12 point font, and should conform to the MLA format and documentation style with your name and the heading in the upper left corner of the first page and 1" margins all around. Do not use title pages. Any writing you do for this class should be carefully proofread and written in a clear, readable, style, with proper citation of sources. Written work must be submitted as hard copy unless specifically noted on the assignment. Be aware that plagiarism, the act of using the words or ideas of others inaccurately or without giving them proper and full credit, is a serious offense with serious repercussions; see the Code of Student Conduct.

Facilities and Equipment

You have access to the resources of both the HopKins Black Box theatre (simple neutral set pieces, projection, lights, properties, costumes, etc.) and Studio 151 (primarily digital video cameras and editing equipment) for your projects for this course. In class, we'll go over what equipment is available and how you go

about getting access to it. Studio 151 has staff and peer mentors who can acquaint you or help you with digital technologies. In order to use of any of the technologies and spaces you must follow all policies and procedures stipulated by those in charge of them. If there is enough demand, we will hold workshops to acquaint you with the technologies you will be using.

Four primary conditions apply to working outside of class time in the HBB: 1) You must sign out a time with the instructor who will make the request to the HBB manager, and notify the instructor well in advance so that we can arrange access. 2) You must clean up and put the space back how you found it (or neater!) when you're done working—this includes returning any equipment to where it is stored in good order. 3) You must secure all doors—the space must be locked when not in use. Pay special attention to the back door since it must be shoved *hard* to close all the way. There are 5 doors to the space, and it is imperative that you check all five as the last thing you do when you leave the space, even if you didn't use some of the doors. 4) You may not work alone in the HBB. *No exceptions.*

Please note carefully the sections in the Guerilla Art Kit about safety and subterfuge. Some of the assignments in this class require you to make art in/of public spaces. Use common sense. Remember that installation art is transitory; although you may alter space, your alterations should not be permanent, nor should they pose risk or threat to the environment or to others. Creating those risks or threats will result in automatic failure of the assignment, and possibly carry further disciplinary repercussions. If you are in doubt, come talk to me about it.

Schedule: subject to changes to meet the demands of the class

T 8/21	Introductions; what is installation art?
TH 8/23	Activity
T 8/28	Reading: 3 short pieces that define installation: Bishop, <i>Installation Art</i> intro (6-13); Reiss, <i>From Margin to Center</i> intro (xi-xxiv) and Rosenthal, "Understanding Installation Art" (23-29) (these will be on Moodle)
TH 8/30	Reading: Bishop Chapter One, The Dream Scene (14-47) Bring metonym to class; presentations assigned
T 9/4	Cornell box assigned
TH 9/6	Reading: Cornell materials on Moodle, including "Navigating the Imagination" website Work on Cornell boxes; bring materials
T 9/11	Cornell boxes due; class gallery and responses
TH 9/13	Reading: Bishop Chapters 2-3 Heightened Perception and Mimetic Engulfment Jee Young blow-up assigned
T 9/18	Student presentations on installation artists
TH 9/20	Presentations continue
T 9/25	Test 1; work on blow-ups
TH 9/27	Install blow-ups
T 10/2	Install blow-ups
TH 10/4	Fall holiday
T 10/9	Reading: Bishop Chapter 4, "Activated Spectatorship,"; selections from <i>Interventionists</i> Guerrilla installation assigned
TH 10/11	Reading: Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City" and Guerrilla Art Kit Guerrilla installation brain/body storm
10/16	Work on guerilla installations
TH 10/18	Work on guerilla installations
T 10/23	Guerrilla installations
TH 10/25	Guerrilla installations; Test 2 (take-home)

T 10/30 Test 2 due; presentations and talkbacks on guerilla installations
TH 11/1 Reading: *Mr. Wilson* Part 1 (through page 69; be sure to read the endnotes);
 materials on video art (on Moodle); Cabinet of wonder video installation assigned

T 11/6 Reading: *Mr Wilson* Part 2 (71-109)
TH 11/8 No class (NCA). Work on video installations.

T 11/13 Guest speaker; Work on video installations
TH 11/15 Work on video installations

T 11/20 Show and tell, drafts of video installations
TH 11/22 Thanksgiving holiday

T 11/27 Video installations due; install videos for showcase performance
W 11/28 7:30 PM Showcase (call time TBA)
TH 11/29 Strike, review, and wrap up

M 12/3, 3:00 – 5:00 PM Final exam (Test 3)