

DNCE 513 Danceaturgy: The Performer as Spectator. Summer 2017.

**Montclair State University
Low-residency MFA in Dance**

(Theory and Research) Expand analytical skills as well as an understanding of theoretical constructs in the areas of dance studies, history, and theory and be able to communicate this understanding both verbally and in written form.

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In this workshop/seminar course, students will bear witness to self *and* others as well as self *with* others, finding the words to objectify the processes informing her/his singular performance, as well as describing those sharing the stage. Guided out-of-body and observational prompts in intentional over-thinking will result in short- and long-form writing, in class and outside. These pieces, critiqued around the table, will ensure that students emerge from the course with refreshed spirits of kinaesthetic insight and empathy.

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Statements of purpose, process and objectives

“A poetics of dance...is a way of studying shared experiments/experiences and, through them, transformations in the sensed – **as much for the dancer as for the dance’s witness.” – Laurence Louppe, *Poétique de la Danse Contemporaine/Poetics of Contemporary Dance.***

Danceaturgy is designed to engender (or rekindle) a salutary drive toward increased critical self-consciousness in the mid-career dancer. Danceaturgy addresses the MFA program’s learning goal of working toward improved written and verbal communication via supervised analyses of the dancer’s personal as well as group-oriented methodologies.

Danceaturgy is predicated upon “dramaturgy” in theatre, with the key distinction that in theatre, the dramaturg is a member of the creative and production team who sits on the sidelines next to the director and acts as a research scholar and cultural/contextual resource for director, cast and crew. The theatre dramaturg works separately and apart from the others in the show. However, the *danceaturg* comes from the ranks of the performers, and steps outside her or his boundaries to assume a singular stance -- looking in as well as on -- from which she or he can evaluate and critique. The *danceaturg*’s power is derived from stepping away from participant action with the express intent of sharing these insights with like-minded performers.

Students will address such questions as: What does it take to bring a dance to life? How do you go about developing character in a dance? How does a dance evolve from an idea? How

do you achieve – and maintain – kinaesthetic clarity? What information is processed through the mind of the performer as he/she moves through the role? How does conscientiously-applied historical and cultural *background* become integral to the *foreground* of the dance as it unfolds? This inquisitive mental posture points to the heart of danceaturgy, reflecting the dancers' *transmutation*, in the broadest sense, of outside information into inside knowledge.

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to call upon a widened critical vocabulary; indeed, for the most part, it will be a vocabulary that will have been invented over the arc of the course. They will have the capacity to find the words to accompany the actions that are, in most cases, habitually and intuitively performed. They will find the terms to apply to inarticulate muscle-memory in themselves, as well as in the ensemble, thereby addressing the interlocking 'moment to moment' operant social conditions of a dance performance. This enforced mental back-tracking will result in an escalation of language that will have the byproduct of causing the students to articulate *how* movement is invested with meaning, and *why* they have the capacity become better dancers in a profession relentlessly predicated upon the ameliorative impulse.

The cognitive and performative ideals itemized above will be achieved through **(1)** assigned readings accompanied by short critical essays; **(2)** in-class prompts given by the instructor to be fulfilled in fifteen minutes of "free writing," geared to performative situations in the students' immediate experience, as well as to hypothetical, imagined performance scenarios; and **(3)** round-table writing and critique workshop exercises designed to create an atmosphere of collegial listening and respect for the stances of others.

Evaluation

Class participation; assigned critical papers; occasional in-class exercises; final essay and presentation of case study to the group followed by Q&A session.

Required reading

Brown, Jean Morrison, et. al., eds. *The Vision of Modern Dance in the Words of its Creators*. 2nd edition. Hightstown, NJ: Princeton Book Company, 1998.
Loupe, Laurence. *Poétique de la Danse Contemporaine/Poetics of Contemporary Dance*. Translated from the French by Sally Gardner. Alton (U.K.): Dance Books, Ltd, 2010.
Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. *The Phenomenology of Dance*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966. New edition, Temple University Press, forthcoming spring 2015.

Select Bibliography

Bales, Melanie, and Rebecca Netti-Fiol, eds. *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
Barthes, Roland. *Image Music Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.
Bolens, Guillemette. *The Style of Gestures*. Translated by Alain Berthoz. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.

deMarinis, Marco and Paul Dwyer. "Dramaturgy of the Spectator." *The Drama Review/TDR*, 31.2 (Summer 1987), pp. 100-114.

Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Perigee Books, 1934, reprint 2005.

Flusser, Vilem. *Gestures*. Translated by Nancy Ann Roth. Minneapolis: the University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Foster, Susan Leigh. *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

Gehm, Sabine, Pirkko Husemann, and Katharina von Wilicke, eds. *Knowledge in Motion: Perspectives of Artistic and Scientific Research in Dance*. Bielefeld and Piscataway (NJ): Transcript Verlag/Transaction Publishers

Lepecki, Andre, ed. *Dance/Documents of Contemporary Art*. London and Boston: MIT Press, 2012.

McAuley, Gay. *Not Magic But Work: An Ethnographic Account of a Rehearsal Process*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2012.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. "Why are there several arts, and not just one?" in *The Muses*. Translated by Peggy Kanuf. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996

Noland, Carrie. *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Ranciere, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. London and New York: Verso, 2009.

Turner, Cathy and Synne K. Behrndt. *Dramaturgy and Performance*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

-- NB, as of 6/2016