

CA 359: Selected Topics in Theatre (Spring 2019)

The Theory and Practice of Festival Performance: PuSh 2019

Meeting Time: Fridays, 9:30 am-12:20 pm, GCA 4270

Instructors: Cole Lewis (nicole_lewis@sfu.ca) and Peter Dickinson (peter_dickinson@sfu.ca)

Office Hours: Cole: by appointment, GCA 3365; Peter: Thursdays, 1:30-3 pm, or by appointment, GCA 3510

Course Description: International performance festivals have become crucial to the circulation of new multidisciplinary work in the live arts, helping to connect international artists with local audiences, incubating conversations about innovative performance practices and presentation models, providing industry networking opportunities for artists and programmers, and bringing together a city's creative communities. As Vancouver's PuSh International Performing Arts Festival enters its fifteenth year, this course will give students a unique window onto its inner workings. In addition to attending and analyzing a range of performances, we will audit industry talks and pitch sessions, participate in panel discussions, and meet with members of the PuSh staff. Several visiting artists will also share their expertise in a series of master classes with students. Following the conclusion of the festival, we will turn our attention to contextualizing our experiences, assessing our individual artistic relationships to festival presentation, our collective takeaways from this year's PuSh in relation to its curatorial vision, and working to document some of this history in the form of a final archival and outreach project.

Required Texts: A series of articles and critical materials will be posted to Canvas; specific readings will be assigned on a week-by-week basis.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and active participation	20%
Performance review 1	15%
Performance review 2	15%
Written project description and in-class festival pitch	20%
Group archiving and community outreach project	30%

Syllabus:

Jan 4	Class: Introduction to the class and confirmation of festival performance and event schedule
Jan 11	Class: The PuSh Festival in context
Jan 16/17	Performance: See <i>Corazón del Espantapájaros (Heart of a Scarecrow)</i> Exhibition and Performance, Audain Gallery, SFU Woodward's, 7 pm

- Performance:** See *Kiinalik*, Performance Works, 7 pm (95 minutes)
- Jan 31 **Pitch Session (TBD):** Attend PushOFF Pitch Session 1, Russian Hall, 1-4:30 pm*
- *Attendance at this session is contingent on availability
- Performance:** See *Pancho Villa* at The Vogue, 8 pm (75 minutes)
- Feb 1 **Class:** Evalyn Parry workshop (1 hour only)
- Talk:** Attend Critical Ideas Panel 3: Ethics + Consent, Djavad Mowafaghian Cinema, SFU Woodward's, 10:30 am-12 pm
- Pitch Session (TBD):** Attend PushOFF Pitch Session 2, Russian Hall, 1-4:30 pm*
- *Attendance at this session is contingent on availability
- Performance:** See *L'Homme de Hus*, Vancouver Playhouse, 8 pm (60 minutes)
- Feb 2 **Talk:** Attend *An Awkward and Embarrassing Conversation About Difference*, with Sarah Garton Stanley and Marcus Youssef, Russian Hall, 11:30 am-3 pm
- Performance:** See *Zvizdal*, Roundhouse Community Centre, 4 pm (75 minutes)
- Feb 8 **Class:** Festival debrief and critical synthesis of ideas and issues
- Performance review 2 due
- Feb 15 **Class:** Thinking about your project pitches
- Feb 22 READING BREAK
- March 1 **Class:** First set of project pitches
- March 8 **Class:** Second set of project pitches
- March 15 **Class:** Archiving PuSh's first fifteen years for the community*
- *For this class we will be joined by PuSh Interim Artistic Director Joyce Rosario and PuSh Interim Executive Director Roxanne Duncan
- March 22 **Class:** Discussion of progress on group archiving projects

March 29 **Class:** Discussion of progress on group archiving projects

April 5 **Class:** Presentation of group archiving projects

Attendance and Active Participation

- It is imperative that you attend all classes and ticketed PuSh performances that have been booked for us by festival staff. Failure to do so will have serious adverse consequences on your grade.
- In addition, you are expected to attend as many of the listed talks, pitch sessions, and parallel industry events as possible. We understand that other course and work commitments might preclude full participation in these sidebar events; please talk to us if this is the case.
- Our understanding is that all students will participate actively, enthusiastically, and respectfully in class discussions, and will listen and offer meaningful feedback on the work of their peers. In order to facilitate this, it is our collective responsibility to maintain a classroom environment where all feel comfortable to speak, and where intellectual curiosity fuels dialogue and debate.

Performance Reviews

- You are required to write critical reviews of two of the PuSh performances you will see.
- The first review is due by midnight on January 25 and should be sent electronically as a Word attachment to both Cole and Peter. The subject of this review can be anything you have seen up to and including Selina Thompson's *salt* and/or *Race Cards*.
- The second review is due by midnight on February 8 and can be focused on a work we will have seen during the last week of the festival or on a work you have not yet written on from the first two weeks.
- Your audience: the general arts enthusiast who wants to learn more about the work you are reviewing.
- Format: Your review should be a maximum of 500 words, and should be double-spaced; it should be typewritten, in 12-point font, with one-inch margins.
- Basic Template: As *Guardian* theatre critic Lyn Gardner has stated about arts reviewing, "The first rule is that there are no rules.... There are as many ways to write a review as there are personal responses to any [show]." That said, one's subjective response to the work of art being reviewed needs to be informed and credible—regardless of the medium and your relative expertise in/with that medium. As a reviewer, your job is to provide your reader with a critical framework for understanding the work; this means describing what you saw, but also situating the work—and the success or failure of different aspects of its execution—within a larger context that might include: previous work by the same artist(s); specific formal or content-based trends within or across different disciplines; the programming or curatorial mandates of given presenters; etc. A good review is a mix of sharp, concrete description and nuanced analysis and interpretation. Often it is more important to ask how something works than what it means. And while reviews very often include an explicit evaluative judgment and/or recommendation, they don't always have to.

You can have analysis and interpretation without judgment, but you cannot have judgment without analysis and interpretation. In terms of constructing your review, consider the following rubric:

1. Introduction: What do I know? What do I want my readers to know?
 2. Description: What did I see? How were the different elements under consideration executed?
 3. Analysis/Interpretation: How do the individual parts fit together to make a whole? Is a particular or unique statement being made in terms of either the content or form of the work? By what criteria are you measuring the success or failure of different elements of the piece?
 4. Conclusion: What was accomplished? How was I affected? This section may include an explicit judgment and/or recommendation related to the work—but it doesn't have to.
- For some examples of PuSh reviews by Peter, visit performanceplacepolitics.blogspot.com and click on any of the yearly January/February tabs.
 - Finally, if you quote from any additional materials (e.g. program or gallery notes) or persons in your review, be sure to give due credit.

Project Description and In-Class Festival Pitch

- Based on your observation of the different industry pitch sessions we will be attending, as well as your general assimilation of different cross-disciplinary trends in the performance works you will have seen, this assignment asks you to reflect on your own practice and to conceive of a project that you might realistically pitch for inclusion in a festival like PuSh.
- The assignment has two parts: 1) a 500-word written description of the work, including technical requirements, that you will submit electronically to Cole and Peter on the Wednesday before your scheduled pitch; and 2) a 10-15 minute in-class pitch to your peers in which you explain your concept and/or perform an excerpt from the piece.
- Your audience: a producer who wants to learn more about your work so that they can consider whether it suits their performance venue, budget, and community.
- Basic Template: In terms of constructing a strong pitch, consider the following rubric:
 1. A pitch contextualizes the performance in relation to the broader world we live in. Why is your performance necessary? Why is it necessary in this Festival? And why is it necessary now?
 2. A pitch has a story. A story – whether it is the story of your company, your creation process, or your performance – can help the producers remember your pitch.
 3. A pitch ignites imagination. The reader/audience of your pitch should be able to clearly envision your performance and be excited to see it. Considering the tone of your pitch can help achieve this.
 4. A pitch defines performance needs. Clarify the story/form/concept of your performance in relation to touring requirements. How many people do you need to tour with this project? What are the technical needs? What size space is required? How long of a technical rehearsal will be requested? If you have a community user group, how will you perform outreach? And so on. Carefully consider the constraints of touring a show and ensure your proposal addresses those constraints.

5. A pitch is succinct. Strive for clarity that is concise alongside creativity.

- Based on the feedback you receive from your peers, you are then asked to revise your written description, submitting a final copy electronically to Cole and Peter by the following Monday at noon.

Group Archiving and Community Outreach Project

- For the final assignment of the course you will be working in groups on an archival project that seeks to contextualize some aspect of PuSh’s history, producing a form of multi-media performance documentation that might conceivably be used by both PuSh Festival staff and the School for the Contemporary Arts for future community engagement endeavors.
- For example, you might trace the performance genealogy of a single PuSh show, producing a timeline of when and where the work has toured both before and after PuSh, synthesizing the critical responses to the work, and looking at the impact the show has made on subsequent festival programming. Or you might wish to focus on the history of site-specific work at PuSh, or programming that has involved local/community performers, or the evolution of specific accessibility and diversity initiatives at the festival.
- We will work together with PuSh staff to determine relevant and meaningful archival projects and the specific communities they might be targeted to. As such, the specific parameters of this project will evolve over the course of the semester.
- That said, we envision this project requiring you to interview and/or liaise with different PuSh staff, and we are also hoping that the form for the final projects is accessibly multi-modal: e.g., a website, a short film, a series of podcasts or audio recordings, a photo essay, etc.
- Projects will be presented at the last class, ideally with PuSh staff in attendance, after which we will determine how and where the projects will be archived for posterity.

Grading Policies

- **No late assignments will be accepted without a documented medical excuse.**
- **Plagiarism or academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course.** Consult the following website for more information: <https://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/student/s10-01.html>. **Ignorance of the standards set out by the School and university will not preclude the imposition of severe penalties for any instance of academic dishonesty.**
- All assignments (oral and written) will be assessed according to **content** and **expression**: that is, **what** you say and **how** you say it. All assignments will be given letter grades and will be assessed according to the following standards:

Grade	GPA/%	Description	Comments
A+	4.33 95-100%	Outstanding	Demonstrates an outstanding knowledge of concepts and techniques with a very high degree of skill and originality; an exceptional ability to communicate; evidence of outstanding research skills and an extensive knowledge base.

A	4.0 90-94%	Excellent	Demonstrates an excellent knowledge of concepts and techniques with a high degree of skill and elements of originality; a strong ability to communicate; excellent research and conceptual skills.
A-	3.67 85-89%		
B+	3.33 80-84%	Very Good	Demonstrates a very good knowledge of concepts and techniques, some originality and independence of thought; above average research and conceptual skills.
B	3.0 75-79%	Good	Demonstrates a good knowledge of concepts and techniques; an ability to organize and analyze ideas and to communicate clearly and fluently; good indication of research.
B-	2.67 70-74%		
C+	2.33 65-69%	Satisfactory	Demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of concepts and techniques, together with some skill in using them; an adequate indication of research.
C	2.0 60-64%		
C-	1.67 55-59%	Marginal	Demonstrates a marginal grasp of the subject matter; a less than satisfactory ability to communicate and organize ideas; little indication of research.
D	1.0 50-54%	Unsatisfactory	Demonstrates an unsatisfactory grasp of the concepts and techniques; rudimentary knowledge of the subject matter; some evidence that organizational and analytic skills have been developed, but with significant weaknesses in some areas; no indication of research; barely meets the minimum requirements to pass.
F	0-49%	Fail	Demonstrates an inadequate understanding of the subject matter; poor organization and communication skills. A student at this level has failed to meet the minimum requirements to pass.
N	0	Incomplete	Some or all of the coursework is incomplete. The instructor does not expect the student to ever complete the coursework.
DE	N/A	Deferred	Some of the coursework is not yet complete for valid (documented) reasons (e.g., medical). The instructor and student have determined a mutually agreeable timeline for the completion of the coursework.
GN	N/A	Grade Not Available	Grade not available due to circumstances beyond instructor/TA control.
AE	N/A	Compassionate Pass	The student has done at least 50% of the coursework, and would pass the course by completing the remainder, but has a compelling reason not to do so (e.g., medical, family crisis/death, etc.).

