

CA 826: Performance Studies

CA 414: Advanced Topic in the History of Art and Culture

Spring 2020

Performing Cities: Vancouver and Beyond

Instructor:

Dr. Peter Dickinson (peter_dickinson@sfu.ca)

Seminar Time and Location:

Tuesday 5:30-8:20 pm, GCA 4390

Office Hours:

By appointment: GCA 3510

Course Description:

A hallmark of twenty-first century living is that more than half of the world's population now resides in cities. As sites of cultural and economic exchange, political contestation and social action, metropolitan centres thus become critical nodes through which to understand how discourses of placemaking (both instrumentalist and resistant) circulate locally and globally. Drawing from a wide range of performance studies theorists, in this course we will examine such urban flows through the lens of performance. From signature architecture to highly choreographed outdoor spectacles, from public art biennales to destination restaurants, performance has become a theatrical adjunct of global civic branding, used to attract tourists, investors, and high-income residents. At the same time, the performativity of these performances—what they instantiate and reproduce over time—risks overwriting earlier and more historically sedimented performances of place, in part by feeding gentrification and contributing to a deepening divide between the 1% and everyone else. This is paradigmatically the case in a city like Vancouver, one of the most expensive cities in the world, and also the traditional unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples. We will thus ground (quite literally) our initial discussions of Vancouver as a performing city by carrying out a series of practice-based walking exercises that draw on methods of sensory ethnography and Indigenous “place-thought.” Thereafter, we will turn our attention to a discussion of other transnational urban performances, complementing our theoretical readings with relevant case studies (e.g., the franchising of art museums like the Guggenheim and the Louvre in Bilbao and Abu Dhabi; performances of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in war- and flood-ravaged Sarajevo and New Orleans; how different cities play themselves—or stand in for others—on screen; etc.). Students will also be given the opportunity to develop a final project (either independently or collaboratively) that may address the concerns of the course through a specific site and/or object of study that is relevant to their research, and that may involve a range of knowledge outcomes, including writing, performance, visual documentation, installation, etc.

Required Texts:

Weekly readings will be posted to Canvas as pdf articles.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and active participation	15%
Walking diary	15%
Seminar reading summary and discussion facilitation	15%
Project proposal	15%
Final project and paper	40%