

**FPA 228W
DANCE AESTHETICS
Fall 2015**

Instructor Contact Info:

Dr. Peter Dickinson

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 3-5 pm, GCA 2380 (SFU Woodward's)

Also Wednesdays 1-3 pm, AQ 6117 (SFU Burnaby)

Lecture Time and Location:

Thursday 5:30-8:20 pm, GCA 4350

Course Description:

Dance is often described as the most ephemeral of artistic forms. This idea, while seductively romantic, has historically impeded the development of a robust critical discourse on dance as a discipline. Consequently, there remains a perception both by the public and many practitioners that an understanding and appreciation of dance somehow escapes or exceeds an articulation of the concepts behind it in language. How does one describe an already abstract movement phrase, the aesthetic choices made in developing that phrase, and the sensory and emotional stakes of experiencing that phrase in performance when it has disappeared? And yet, as demonstrated by the communicative and creative collaborations between dancers and choreographers in the studio, and equally by audience members' and critics' reception of the results on stage, the verbal expression and written analysis of the practical skills and theoretical ideas that give shape to a dance are integral to the medium. Indeed, as students will learn in this class, articulating the continued artistic and social relevance of dance arguably depends on brining these discourses around theory and practice together. To enable such dialogue we will read a selection of writings from the growing body of dance theory, placing different critical approaches to movement aesthetics within a larger tradition of the philosophy of art (from Plato and Kant to Langer and Sontag), and also applying these approaches to an analysis of several iconic dance pieces. Topics to be considered include: the nature of aesthetic experience; description vs. interpretation; critical judgment; artistic inspiration and the creative process; the formation of taste; high vs. low art; the economics and politics of art; etc. While our focus will primarily be on the history of western concert dance and contemporary responses to it in North America and Europe, we will also consider different forms of world dance (including butoh, capoeira, khatak, and First Nations dancing), as well as social, street and community dance. Finally, as this is a writing-intensive course, emphasis will be placed on developing students' written responses to dance—both through low stakes in-class exercises and more formal take-home essays.

Educational Goals:

- To develop an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of different critical theories of dance.
- To place dance theory within the larger history of aesthetics and the philosophy of art.
- To use interpretative strategies derived from dance and aesthetic theory to advance arguments, ideas and position statements, both written and verbal, about the nature of dance.
- To analyze and evaluate in words the formal elements and expressive ideas of a given dance piece.
- To develop and hone students' critical thinking and writing skills.

- To introduce through practice different written formats (reviews, critical responses, the philosophical essay) associated with an analysis of the arts.

Required Texts:

All readings have been posted as PDF documents to the FPA 228W Canvas site. Visit <http://canvas.sfu.ca>, type in your computing id and password, and then click on FPA 228W from the “Courses” dropdown menu.

Because this course includes canonical readings in the history of the philosophy of art and specific critical assessments of dance, there is a significant amount of material to cover each week. However, to make things easier, I have divided the readings into required and recommended categories. Some of the readings will also be very dense and difficult. Don’t panic. The main thing is to absorb as much of the gist of the required readings as possible, and to come to class with any questions you have, which we will work through together. There will also be opportunities to revise the weekly reading load if it clearly becomes too burdensome.

Several of the recommended readings are actually essays that I have written on dance. This is not meant to be hubris on my part; rather, it is to give you a sense of how I have approached some of the different questions we will be dealing with, as well as how I have tackled the issue of writing about movement aesthetics in both concrete physical and abstract philosophical ways. You can also follow my responses to the dance I see in Vancouver from month to month by reading my blog: <http://performanceplacepolitics.blogspot.com>.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and Class Participation	20%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While I will be lecturing on the new material each week, a significant portion of our time together will be devoted to discussion—both of the readings and the recorded dance excerpts we watch in class. Everybody starts with an automatic 12 marks for this portion of your grade—1 mark for every week we meet. That mark will decrease for every absence that can’t be medically documented. I reserve a discretionary 8 marks to reward you for active and engaged participation in our weekly class discussions and in-class activities. 	
Short In-Class Writing Assignments and Blog Posts	20%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As this is a writing-intensive course, a portion of every class will be given over to articulating in prose your thoughts about dance and the critical analysis of it. These will be low-stakes writing prompts based on questions posed by me, your responses to the dance excerpts we will watch together, perhaps even ruminations on what you accomplished in the studio that day. In addition, based on your group assignments for your final presentations, you will be responsible for making two individual blog posts over the course of the semester. These will be based on questions I will pose in connection with our weekly readings. <u>Specific instructions about the blog posts can be found in a separate document posted to Canvas.</u> 	
Midterm Paper	25%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>See the instructions posted to Canvas.</u> 	
Final Paper and Class Presentation	35%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>See the instructions posted to Canvas.</u> 	

Materials/Supplies:

None, but when possible students will be encouraged to attend different live dance performances taking place in Vancouver during the semester.

Weekly Syllabus:

Week 1: Sept 10 Understanding Dance Aesthetics

Required Reading

Graham McFee, "Basic Concepts for Aesthetics"

Week 2: Sept 17 Classical Aesthetic Theory

Required Readings

Plato, from *The Ion*

Oscar Wilde, from "The Decay of Lying"

Clive Bell, "The Aesthetic Hypothesis"

Suzanne Langer, "Expressiveness and Symbolism"

George Dickie, "The New Institutional Theory of Art"

Recommended Reading

Peter Dickinson, "*Cédric Andrieux*: With Bel, Benjamin and Brecht in Vancouver"

Week 3: Sept 24 The Aesthetic Experience and Questions of Value

Required Readings

Jerome Stolnitz, "The Aesthetic Attitude"

John Dewey, "Having an Experience"

Monroe Beardsley, "Arts in the Life of Man"

Week 4: Oct 1 Description vs. Interpretation

Required Readings

Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation"

Joan Acocella, "Imagining Dance"

Deborah Jowitt, "Beyond Description: Writing Beneath the Surface"

Roger Copeland, "Between Description and Deconstruction"

Recommended Readings

Sondra Fraleigh, "A Vulnerable Glance: Seeing Dance Through Phenomenology"

Peter Dickinson, "Textual Matters: Making Narrative and Kinesthetic Sense of Crystal Pite's Dance-Theater"

*Week 5: Oct 8 Taste, Critical Judgment, and Cultural Difference**

Required Readings

David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste"
Carl Wilson, from *Let's Talk About Love* (chs. 7 and 8 especially)
Ted Cohen, "High and Low Thinking about High and Low Art"
Arlene Croce, "Discussing the Undiscussable"
Carol Martin, "High Critics, Low Arts"
Deidre Sklar, "Five Premises for a Culturally Sensitive Approach to Dance"

Recommended Readings

Immanuel Kant, "Analytic of the Beautiful"
Pierre Bourdieu, from *Distinction*
Jane Desmond, "Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies"

***Drafts of midterm papers due**

*Week 6: Oct 15 Contemporary Critical Issues 1: American Postmodern Dance**

Readings

Monroe Beardsley, "What Is Going on In a Dance?"
Noël Carroll and Sally Banes, "Working and Dancing"
Sally Banes, Introduction to *Terpsichore in Sneakers*
Cynthia Novack, from *Sharing the Dance*

***Midterm papers due**

Week 7: Oct 22 Contemporary Critical Issues 2: European Dance Theatre

Required Readings

Royd Climenhaga, "An Artistic and Contextual History," from *Pina Bausch*
Ann Daly, "*Tanztheater*: The thrill of the lynch mob or the rage of a woman"
Susan Manning, "An American perspective on *Tanztheater*"
André Lepecki, "Choreography's Slower Ontology: Jérôme Bel's Critique of Representation"

Recommended Reading

Hal Foster, Introduction to *The Anti-Aesthetic*

Week 8: Oct 29 Contemporary Critical Issues 3: Gender and Sexuality in Dance

Required Readings

Susan Leigh Foster, "The Ballerina's Phallic Pointe"
Ramsay Burt, "The Trouble with the Male Dancer..."
Louise Owen, "'Work that Body': Precarity and Femininity in the New Economy"

Week 9: Nov 5 CLASS CANCELLED

Week 10: Nov 12 Contemporary Critical Issues 4: Disability and Dance + The Economics of Dance

Required Readings

Tobin Siebers, from *Disability Aesthetics*

Bree Hadley, "Marie Chouinard – *bODY rEMIX/gOLDBERG vARIATIONS*," from *Disability, Public Space Performance and Spectatorship* (pp.159-64 especially)

Randy Martin, "A Precarious Dance, A Derivative Sociality"

Recommended Reading

Peter Dickinson, "Showing Support: Some Reflections on Vancouver's Dance Economies"

*Week 11: Nov 19 Contemporary Critical Issues 5: Beyond the Concert Stage: Sighting/Siting Dance**

Required Readings

Claire Bishop, "The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum"

M. Ventura, "White Boys Dancing"

Tim Lawrence, "Beyond the Hustle"

Sherrill Dodds, "From Busby Berkeley to Madonna: Music Video and Popular Dance"

Christina Zantegna, "The Multi-Ringed Cosmos of Krumping"

***Drafts of final paper introductions due**

Recommended Reading

Peter Dickinson, "Choreographies of Place: Dancing the Vancouver Sublime from Dusk to Dawn"

*Week 12: Nov 26 Presentations**

***Final papers due**

Week 13: Dec 3 Presentations