



## **Boston University Study Abroad London**

### **Theatre Capital: Performance in London / London in Performance CFA TH 508 (*Elective A*)**

#### **Background to the Course**

*Theatre Capital: Performance in London / London in Performance* is a Hub-aligned course that builds upon the success of a long-running course *British Contemporary Theatre* (running continuously and taught by the same tutor since September 1991). This newly revised offer will continue to focus on what makes most logical sense for you, a travel abroad student: the first-hand experience of theatrical production and performance practice in London and its rigorous analysis. And it will continue to place that experience within a critical sense of your own subject position and identity formation as a creative and thinking agent of change.

#### **What Will the Course Do?**

Over the nine-session, four-week programme the tutor will convene multiple critical conversations, lecture to you drawing on his own and others' published works in the field, collectively explore film and online evidence of the examples of practice selected for the programme. You will attend a minimum of three theatrical productions, and a number of performance-related experiences and site visits to explore the performative nature of the Royal Courts of Justice, the relations between visual arts performance and visual cultures at Tate Modern, and the theatricalities of financialisation as represented by the City of London financial district.

In this way 'field work', the direct witness of cultural acts in situ, will ensure you engage in detail and with rigour to the evidence of notable works in the theatre repertoire in London *and* be in a position to compare and contrast such *staged* acts with more elusive and challenging manifestations of performance practice inherent across the capital's institutional and cultural processes of law, art, finance, and psychoanalysis.

Prior to such engagements you will be introduced to relevant readings (from the course reader and beyond), film and online resources that advance your understanding of the significance and relevance of what you are witnessing to the wider cultural realm of which these acts form a part, you will be instructed as to how best to place such experiences within critical, philosophical and historical contexts that do most to elucidate what is interesting about them. In each and all cases the question of your mode of spectatorship will be central to discussion committing you to a serious and sustained analysis of how your theatrical experiences relate to questions of post-truth society, fake news, social justice, ethics of action and commitments to critical causes.

On return to the classroom you will be invited and guided to critically address the work you have witnessed in the field in the frameworks of seminars, round tables, peer group presentations and interim verbal feedback, in each case with the tutor steering the critical

conversation in ways that are supportive of all students irrespective of your cultural experience or confidence in theatre practices and theories prior to the programme.

Indeed a feature of the course (and its predecessor since 1991) as an elective class has been the detailed and rigorous use made of all major emphases, allowing economics, business, psychology, ethnography and communications students to prosper equally drawing upon your own very relevant vocabularies of analysis as well as the newly emerging confidence with performance analyses yourselves. Performance Studies, the discipline that underpins this course, is peculiarly well suited to what is called a ‘Braided Approach’ to disciplinary study of this kind and is wholly inclusive of disciplinary experience *whatever* that might be.

These sessions will allow for both the learning outcomes associated with philosophical frameworks, and those built out of aesthetic appreciation, to come together in such a way as to ensure you feel informed, critically aware and confident enough to consider entering associated professional fields on graduation. While this work is NOT vocational (it remains wholly within the purview of the learning outcomes as outlined) it does ensure in actively engaging with British Contemporary Theatre you understand in detail the dynamics, pressures and pleasures of that world of work.

To call theatre ‘work’ is to recognise its *material history* rather than its mysterious legacies. You are encouraged to understand your role as fee-paying clients to an act for which others are paid, more or less, to show you something (for good or ill). You are a leisure class in this respect. The economic and class materiality of theatre releases you to be bolder agents in your expectations for how such acts might relate with radical criticality towards the economic world in which such acts are sustained (and threatened) and to be confident in your agential relationships to that world of change in which theatre plays its not insignificant part.

Theatre Capital is, as the title suggests, a performance related course that makes special and specific demands on students and offers precise educational strategies to achieve the desired learning outcomes. These strategies are directly grown out of the repertoires of the five-week programme when you are in London and engaging with the theatre, they are relevant to what you actually *see* in the theatre and are designed to ensure feedback loops of critical discussion and writing are always coherent and explicit.

### Hub-aligned Course Objectives

Drawing on semiotic strategies students identify symbolic processes and analyse the construction of performed images as visual and performance art. They will understand theatre staged in the urban realm as having particular reflections and/or influences from its performing environment and audience.

*[Aligned to Aesthetic Exploration Learning Outcome 1: Students will demonstrate knowledge and appreciation of notable works in literature and/or the arts, including the cultural contexts in which those works were created, and be able to identify their ongoing significance and relevance.]*

Students are introduced to and apply in discussion and assessment the vocabulary of performance studies, as well as the concepts of phenomenology and subject position. Using semiotics and the analysis of sign systems, critical theory and introductory level ethnographic enquiry, they discuss and analyse across multiple media their fieldwork and collected evidence (case studies, examples and images) of theatre and urban performativity.

*[Aligned to Aesthetic Exploration Learning Outcome 2: Students will demonstrate the reasoning skills and vocabulary necessary to interpret a work of art (literature, music, visual arts, etc.).]*

Students produce post-site visit written reports, photo essays and presentations, escalating formative and summative engagement, that demonstrate their evolving understanding of theatre as a dynamic, complex and responsive element of London life, applying concepts from performance studies and its semiotic aspect. Students share images, photos and video from their theatrical inquiries and fieldwork in class. *[Aligned to Aesthetic Exploration Learning Outcome 3: Students will produce evaluative, analytical, or creative works that demonstrate at least one literary or artistic medium.]*

In both at-home silent and in-class aloud reading of performance studies philosophy by foundational critical theoreticians, students are introduced to the philosophical thought and critical theory of performance studies. In dialogue with each other and the tutor, students apply this vocabulary to ideas beyond a purely theoretical framework, in order to fluently identify, contextualise and relate political, social, and aesthetic ideas and events to their observations and experiences. *[Aligned to Philosophical Interpretation and Life's Meanings Learning Outcome 1: Students will demonstrate knowledge of notable works in philosophical thought, make meaningful connections among them, and be able to relate those works to their own lives and those of others.]*

Using the semiotic and ethnographic vocabulary acquired through reading and developed in class, students reflect upon significant works of theatrical culture, performance acts in the urban realm through the lens of various philosophical topics that arise from such experiences, including questions of the just society and right action. *[Aligned to Philosophical Interpretation and Life's Meanings Learning Outcome 2: Students will demonstrate the reasoning skills and possess the vocabulary to reflect upon significant philosophical questions and topics such as what constitutes a good life, right action, meaningful activity, knowledge, truth, or a just society.]*

### **Additional Course Objectives**

You will practice five imperatives of engagement that I introduce under the COCOE acronym (Coherence of Thought, Organisation of Material, Critical Aptitude, Originality in Perception, and Effort in Preparation) which enable your participation, success and excellence regardless of disciplinary background.

You will be able to apply major or discipline-specific vocabulary to the course content.

You will reflect on social justice in multiple performative realms, due to the focus of British contemporary theatre on the social realm since 1956.

## **Grading Criteria**

The following Boston University table explains the grading system that is used by most faculty members on Boston University's Study Abroad London Programmes.

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Honour Points</u>	<u>Usual %</u>
A	4.0	93-100
A-	3.7	89-92
B+	3.3	85-88
B	3.0	81-84
B-	2.7	77-80
C+	2.3	73-76
C	2.0	69-72
C-	1.7	65-68
D	1.0	60-64
F	0.0	Unmarked

**'Incomplete'** or **I** grades are not permitted because of the obvious difficulty in making up missed work once the student has left the country. All work must be completed on time. We also do not allow **'Audits'** (AU), **'Withdrawals'** (W), or **'Pass/Fail'** (P) grades.

The grades reflect the quality of the work. Lecturers and students should use the following criteria for an understanding of what each grade means.

**A** This exceptional grade is assigned only to work that has persistently outstanding quality in both substance and presentation. The student must demonstrate a sustained capacity for independent thought and extensive study, producing rigorous and convincing analyses in well-ordered prose.

**A-** Awarded to work that is clearly focused and analytical, and based on wide reading. The student must cover all the principal points of a question and systematically develop a persuasive overall thesis, allowing for one or two venial omissions or inapt expressions.

**B+, B, B-** This range of grades indicates that the student has shown some evidence of original thought and intellectual initiative. The student has cited sources beyond the class materials, and shown a degree of originality in perception and/or approach to the subject. The work will show thoughtful management of material, and a good grasp of the issues. The differences between a B+, a straight B and a B- may reflect poor presentation of the material, or mistakes in punctuation, spelling and grammar.

**C+, C, C-** Work in this grade range is satisfactory, but uninspiring. If the work is simply a recitation of the class materials or discussions, and shows no sign of genuine intellectual engagement with the issues, it cannot deserve a higher grade. Should an essay fail to provide a clear answer to the question as set, or argue a position coherently, the grade will fall within this range.

Quality of presentation can lift such work into the upper levels of this grade range. Work of this quality which is poorly presented, and riddled with errors in grammar, spelling and

punctuation, will fall into the lower end of the range. To earn a C grade, the work must demonstrate that the student is familiar with the primary course material, be written well enough to be readily understood, be relevant to the assignment, and, of course, be the student's own work except where properly cited.

**D** A marginal pass can be given where some but not all the elements of the course have been completed satisfactorily.

**F** The failing grade indicates the work is seriously flawed in one or more ways:

- Obvious lack of familiarity with the material
- So poorly written as to defy understanding
- So brief and insubstantial that it fails to properly address the subject
- Material presented is not relevant to the assignment
- Demonstrates evidence of plagiarism (see following section in Academic Conduct Code)

Please refer to the Academic Handbook for detailed grading criteria and policies on plagiarism. This can be accessed via Blackboard Learn: <http://learn.bu.edu>

*\* Final Grades are subject to deductions by the Academic Affairs Office due to unauthorised absences.*

## **Attendance Policies**

### **Classes**

All Boston University London Programme students are expected to attend every class session, seminar, and field trip to fulfil the required course contact hours and receive course credit. Any student that has been absent from two class sessions (whether authorised or unauthorised) will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their continued participation on the programme.

### *Authorised Absence:*

The Authorised Absence Approval Request Form is available through the Academic Affairs section of the BU London Personal Page: <https://fm.bu-london.co.uk/fmi/webd/>

**Please note: Submitting an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form does not guarantee an authorised absence**

Students who expect in advance to be absent from any class should notify a member of Academic Affairs and complete an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form ten working days in advance of the class date.

Students may apply for an authorised absence only under the following circumstances:

- **Illness (first day of sickness):** If a student is too ill to attend class, the student must notify Academic Affairs as soon as possible by submitting an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form in advance of the class. If it is the student's first absence of the semester (from any class) a doctor's note is not required.
- **Illness (multiple days):** If a student is missing more than one class day due to illness, the student must complete an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form

and a sick note from a local doctor excusing their absence from class. Once well enough, the student will need to meet with Academic Affairs.

- Important placement event that clashes with a class (verified by internship supervisor).
- Special circumstances which have been approved by the Directors (see note below).

**The Directors will only in the most extreme cases allow students to leave the programme early or for a significant break.**

#### *Unauthorised Absence:*

Any student to miss a class due to an unauthorised absence will receive a **4% grade penalty** to their final grade for the course whose class was missed.

This grade penalty will be applied by the Academic Affairs office to the final grade at the end of the course. As stated above, any student that has missed two classes will need to meet with Academic Affairs to discuss their participation on the programme as excessive absences may result in a 'Fail' in the class and therefore expulsion from the programme.

#### **Religious Holidays**

Boston University's Office of the University Registrar states:

'The University, in scheduling classes on religious holidays and observances, intends that students observing those traditions be given ample opportunity to make up work. Faculty members who wish to observe religious holidays will arrange for another faculty member to meet their classes or for cancelled classes to be rescheduled.'

#### **Special Accommodations**

Each student will need to contact the Disability & Access Services to request accommodations for the semester they are abroad. Students are advised by BU-DAS not to expect the same accommodations as they receive on campus.

BU London can only uphold special accommodations if we have received the appropriate documentation from the BU-DAS. We cannot accept letters from other universities/centres.

All disabilities need to be known to the DAS in Boston if they are to be used as a reason for requiring a change in conditions, i.e. reduced internship hours or special accommodations for the internship schedule.

#### **Lateness**

Students arriving more than 15 minutes after the posted class start time will be marked as late. Any student with irregular class attendance (more than two late arrivals to class) will be required to meet with the Academic Affairs and if the lateness continues, may have their final grade penalised.