

Veranstalter:	Dennis Büscher-Ulbrich
Thema:	Off-Off-Broadway and Beyond: Experimental Theatre and Avant-Garde Performance 1945–1970 [AA-A3, ENG-7, AA-W]
Art der Veranstaltung:	Seminar Ib
Veranstaltungsnummer:	53-561
Zeit:	Mo 18-20
Raum:	Phil 1269
Beginn:	17. Oktober 2011

### Course Description:

The early developing OFF-OFF-BROADWAY MOVEMENT of the 1950s and 1960s sought freedom from the various constraints — aesthetically and otherwise — of conventional theatre. Mainstream theatre at the time was dominated by the musical and the psychological drama, spawning productions that were conceived as business ventures and, if successful, packaged and toured. The notion of theatre as a packaged commodity offended the avant-garde sensibilities of artists who observed the psychological and physical constraints built within the theatrical space itself. Instead, they enthusiastically turned to alternative sites and experimental forms, eventually collapsing the distinction between theatre and PERFORMANCE ART. While conventional theatre taught the spectator to lose herself in the fictional onstage time, space, and characters, avant-garde theatre and performance relied on the spectator’s complete consciousness of the present, i.e. the real time and space shared by audience and performers. The primary importance of the spectator’s consciousness of the present is that she is an active force in creating the theatrical event rather than a passive observer of a ready-made production.

To approach this phenomenon, we will be looking closely at three significant avant-garde moments in postwar American theatre and performance: THE LIVING THEATRE, HAPPENINGS/FLUXUS, and the BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT. We will analyze and discuss experimental plays that still work within the confines of theatrical space, like *The Connection* (1959) and *Dutchman* (1964), semi-improvisational and interactive plays, like *Paradise Now* (1967), as well as Happenings and other ‘far-out’ performances. Besides exploring some of the manifold links between the US-American postwar avant-garde and its historical precursors, e.g. Dada and Surrealism, Absurdism, Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*, and Artaud’s *Théâtre de la Cruauté*, we will carefully contextualize performances and scrutinize their political implications and cultural significance. The overall aim of the seminar will be to come closer to an understanding of the transformative power of performance and its impact on (postwar US-American) culture.

**Course Requirements:** 1 obligatory in-class presentation, 1 academic term paper (ca. 10 pages). All “required reading” material will be provided in a reader. Additional audiovisual texts will be made available through AGORA. Students are expected to engage as critical participants, viewers, listeners, and readers.

**Sprechstunden:**

nach Vereinbarung

