

NYC College of Technology, CUNY
Department of Humanities
THE 1280: History of Theatre Space and Design in the West

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Office Hours (A630) T/TH: 2-3pm,
or by appointment

SYLLABUS

Required Materials

- Oscar Brockett, Margaret Mitchell, and Linda Hardberger. *Making the Scene: A History of Stage Design and Technology in Europe and the United States*. San Antonio, Texas: Tobin Theatre Arts Fund, 2010.
- Reading pack of plays, histories, and criticism available on Blackboard.
- Timeline: <http://www.timerime.com/en/timeline/1626942/History+of+Theatre+Space+and+Design+in+the+West/>

Required Performance Events

Attend a professional theatre production in New York City with a partner from class. Get tickets to shows *early in the semester* and mark your calendars.

Blackboard Academic Suite

Participation in this class requires ongoing use of the Blackboard system. Announcements, assignments, review questions, and quizzes are given on Blackboard and therefore regular access to a working computer is necessary in order to pass the course.

Course Description

This course will survey the development of Western architectural and scenic styles from ancient Greece through the twenty-first century. This survey will be contextualized in terms of prevailing aesthetic, technological, and performative movements.

Learning Goals

Upon successful completion of this course, students will have a working knowledge of the function and development of important theatrical structures and styles of Europe and the Americas. Within this chronological and geographical scope, students will be able to

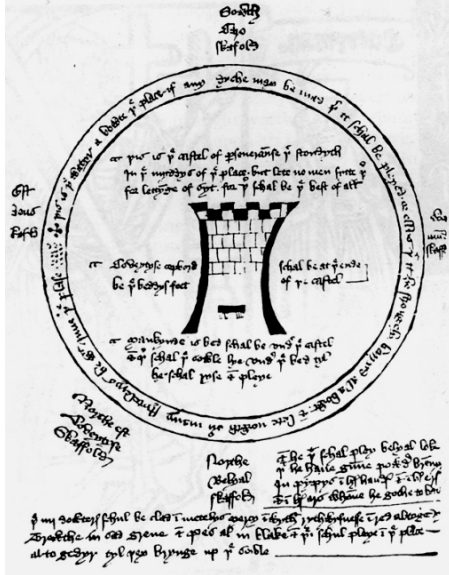
1. Describe historical developments in the physical features and technologies of theatre buildings and stage designs.
2. Identify by name and creator important aesthetic motifs, theatrical venues, and set designs.
3. Explain how design trends relate to political and social contexts.
4. Explain the contribution of major theorists to broad movements in the field.
5. Explain how production concepts and techniques have been adapted for use in ceremonies, processions, and rituals outside of purpose-built theaters (and vice versa).
6. Articulate relationships between performance requirements, audience attitudes, and spatial proxemics (i.e., “the interrelated observations and theories of man’s use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture.”)¹
7. Think critically about ways in which theatre historians use evidence.



¹ Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (Anchor Books, 1966), 1.

Assignments

- 1. Space/Design Project:** In pairs, attend a professional NYC play or musical in a purpose-built or converted theater. One student will observe, research, and analyze the scene design (“scenic space”) and the other will observe, research, and analyze “theatrical space” (marquee, audience, interior and exterior designs, lobby, etc.). There are two components to this assignment:



- a. Group Presentations (10 minutes):** One member of the team will provide a history of the building (original design and construction, architectural style, past productions, etc.), as well as an evaluation of the interior spaces from the audience’s perspective. The second member of the team will present on the scenic design of the production, first providing historical information about the play (genre, themes, production history, etc.), followed by an evaluation of the set design (how the styles and elements respond to themes in the play, mechanical features, and overall success of the production). Both participants should use visual aids with their presentations. There will be time for questions and feedback. **(15%)**

- b. Written Essay (1,800 words):** Individual students will submit a typewritten essay that responds to a series of prompts (see

below). In addition to citing sources like theatrical reviews and playbills, students also need to reference secondary scholarship on theatre design and architecture that support an analysis of the particular theatre building or design elements. **(20%)**

Ticket stubs must be attached to essays. Essays must be typed in Times Roman, 12-point font, and double-spaced, with 1-inch margins, and black ink; follow MLA formatting and bibliography rules. In addition to citing sources like theatrical reviews and playbills, students also need to reference scholarship on theatre design and architecture that support an analysis of a particular theatre structure or design. Three sources minimum are required, only one of which may be an Internet source. For help on citation see <http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/>. Encyclopedias and textbooks should not be listed on the Works Cited page. These types of sources are great for starting your research, as they can provide a general picture of the subject matter and bibliographies with leads to additional material. However, there is nothing in encyclopedias and textbooks that will enable you to say something new or interesting about a subject. *Papers should use correct style and grammar, and I will deduct credit for oversight in these areas. In addition, late papers will be graded down one level (A- to B+).*

- 2. Informal Writing and Quizzes.** A number of informal in-class writing exercises based on seminar lectures and readings will be given. Weekly assignments based on the week’s reading must be completed on Blackboard prior to class period *every Tuesday*. There will be no opportunity to take quizzes after due dates. **(25%)**

- 3. Final Exam.** Identify approximately 20 images (name of designer or architect, date, name of production, artistic and historical styles, functional aspects, technology, physical elements, etc.). Students will also be asked to write a 2-paragraph essay based on an image of their choice. In the essay, students should demonstrate that they 1) know terminology and designs learned in lectures

and textbooks, 2) are able to think critically about ways in which historians use evidence, and 3) are able to describe dynamic relationships between theatrical space and society. **(30%)**

Students who complete every assignment on time will be awarded 5 points to their final grade.

Participation, Attendance, and Punctuality (5%)

- Tours of the Samuel Friedman Theatre (MTC) and the Public Theatre will be scheduled during Thursday Club Hours. Attendance is mandatory.
- There are reading assignments for all class meetings. You will need to spend time reading, re-reading, and thinking about the material on your own in order to prepare for class discussions.
- Students do not need to bring the textbook to class, but the reading pack of critical texts and archival material (Blackboard) must be brought to class.
- Use of cell phones, I-pads, and headphones is *strictly prohibited*. If you are discovered using an electronic device during the final exam you will fail the course.
- General respect: Please give your colleagues your attention and show everyone in the class respect by avoiding off-topic conversation.
- One goal of a liberal arts education is to learn how to engage in critical conversation. This skill involves summarizing your ideas persuasively, defending your interpretations with evidence, listening to those who disagree with you, and re-evaluating your claims based on other arguments or evidence. In this class, you cannot demonstrate and further develop critical discourse unless you are actively present in class. Therefore, attendance means not only arriving to class on time but also actively participating.
- NYCCT regulations allow absences for 3 meetings in a bi-weekly class without penalty. Each lateness counts as a half absence. If you are more than 20 minutes late you will be marked absent. A fourth absence will result in the lowering of the final grade by 10 points (a B- becomes a C-). A fifth absence will result in an automatic WU for the final grade in the course (which becomes an F on your transcript). There are ***no exceptions*** to this rule, so use your absences wisely. I ***do not*** accept doctors' notes or any other excuse for an absence or missed deadline, so ***save*** your absences for unforeseen illnesses or family emergencies. An excellent attendance record is necessary to do well in this course.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES, READING ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS

1280.6470: Tues and Thurs, 10:00-11:15am, Room N/0523A

BB = Readings can be found on Blackboard in Course Documents

Brockett = Brockett, Mitchell, and Hardberger. *Making the Scene*

Class Dates	Classroom Activities	Reading Assignments [READ IN ORDER AS LISTED]	Due Dates, Quizzes and Exams
Week 1 Ending Thursday 1/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review syllabus, textbook, timeline, and goals Definitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ McAuley, <i>Space in Performance</i>, 1-3, 17-35 (BB) ✓ Wiles, <i>A Short History</i>, 23-38 (BB) 	TAKE NOTES EVERY CLASS Make sure you can log onto Blackboard
Week 2 Ending 2/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ritual/theatre Classical and Hellenistic Greece 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Brockett, Chapter 1 ✓ Wiles, <i>A Short History</i>, 38-50 (BB) 	
Week 3 Ending 2/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NO CLASSES 2/12 Roman empire Tour Samuel Friedman Theater 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lefebvre, <i>Production of Space</i>, 30-46 (BB) 	Quiz 1 (Brockett, Lefebvre)
Week 4 Ending 2/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medieval Europe: liturgical beginnings and sacred space Corpus Christi: Processionals Map/video of York pageant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Brockett, 30-48 ✓ Ashley and Sheingorn, "St. Foy on the Loose" (BB) 	Quiz 2 (Brockett, Ashley/Sheingorn)
Week 5 Ending 2/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outdoor biblical plays Secular theatre case study: <i>Cantigas de Santa Maria</i> Analyze BNP MS. Français 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Wiles, <i>A Short History</i>, 74-87 (BB) ✓ Swift, "Puppet, Prop, Presence" (BB) 	Quiz 3 (Wiles, Swift)
Week 6 Ending 3/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Renaissance Outdoors and Indoors Discuss images of <i>Corrales del Príncipe</i> and <i>The Globe</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Brockett, 48-55 ✓ Allen, <i>Reconstruction</i>, 1-6 (BB) 	Quiz 4 (Brockett, Allen)
Week 7 Ending 3/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Italian Renaissance and Indoor Theatre Schedule presentations Tutorial: internet research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Brockett, Chapter 3 ✓ Carlson, "The Jewel" from <i>Semiotics of Theatre</i> (BB) 	Quiz 5 (Brockett, Carlson)
Week 8 Ending 3/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ancien-Regime Royal Entries, Festival books Middleton <i>1604 Royal Entry</i>, pp. 219-227 (BB) in class Baroque and neoclassicism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Adamson, "Intro" to <i>Making of the Ancien-Regime</i>, 10-37 (BB) ✓ Brockett, 112-123; 132-141; 148-150 	Quiz 6 (Adamson, Brockett)
Week 9 Ending 3/28	NO CLASSES – SPRING BREAK		
Week 10 Ending 4/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NO CLASSES TUES. 4/2 In-class presentations of Space/Design projects 		

Class Dates	Classroom Activities	Reading Assignments [READ IN ORDER AS LISTED]	Due Dates, Quizzes and Exams
Week 11 Ending 4/11	▪ In-class presentations of Space/Design projects		Due: Space/Design Essays
Week 12 Ending 4/18	▪ Romanticism ▪ Tour Public Theatre	✓ Brockett, 158-170; 176-184 ✓ Bennett, “Theatre/Tourism” (BB)	Quiz 7 (Brockett, Bennett)
Week 13 Ending 4/25	▪ Melodrama/Naturalism/Realism	✓ Brockett, 190-212; 216-219 ✓ Zola, Preface to <i>Thérèse Raquin</i> (BB)	Quiz 8 (Brockett, Zola)
Week 14 Ending 5/2	▪ Avant-Garde: Symbolism, Expressionism, Bauhaus, Epic, Constructivism	✓ Brockett, 224-251 ✓ Brockett, 258-271; 276-283 ✓ Craig, <i>On the Art of the Theatre</i> , 20-29 (BB)	Quiz 9 (Brockett, Craig)
Week 15 Ending 5/9	▪ American New Stagecraft ▪ Post WWII	✓ Brockett, 290-309; 317-331 ✓ Svoboda, <i>The Secret of Theatrical Space</i> (BB)	Quiz 10 (Brockett, Svoboda)
Week 16 Ending 5/16	▪ Multimedia, Wilson, Postmodernism ▪ Review for Final Exam	✓ Brockett: Epilogue ✓ Giannachi, “Towards an Aesthetic of Virtual Reality” (BB) ✓ Study for Final Exam	Quiz 11 (Brockett, Giannachi)
Week 17	▪ FINAL EXAM: TUESDAY 5/21		

ASSIGNMENTS, fully explicated

Prompts for Essay on “theatrical space”:

Part I. When was the theater building constructed and for what use? If it is a purpose-built theater, what kinds of plays were first performed there? If it is a converted space, what was the original use of the building? When was it converted and what vision did the architects have for the new theater, i.e., what kinds of plays or entertainment events were envisioned for the space? How did the architects execute their vision with design elements in the marquee, lobby, and auditorium, and seating arrangements?

Part II. As discussed throughout the semester, the design and organization of spectator space informs the ways in which audiences experience theatre (democratic vs. hierarchical, interactive vs. hermetic, monumental vs. intimate, sacred vs. profane, etc.). How did the arrangement of *theatrical space* (McAuley’s definition) affect your experience of the production? Based on your experience and observation of other members of the audience, how did the contours, dimensions, dynamics, and organization of theatrical spaces contribute to (or deter) communal engagement before and after the start of the play? Did certain design elements create expectations about the performance? In your opinion, was the theatrical space an appropriate choice for the play you witnessed? Why, or why not?

Evaluation: You will be graded on how well you are able to show a connection between Parts I and II, i.e., how well you are able to *describe* theatrical space and how well you discuss elements of theatrical space in terms of social experience and interaction.

Prompts for Essays on “scenic space”:

Part I. When was the play written and by whom? What is the genre of the play (tragedy, slapstick, family musical, satire, spectacle, etc.)? Who designed the stage scenery and how does this particular design fit into the designer’s body of work? Describe the scenery as best you can: talk about colors, shapes, moving set pieces, stationary set pieces, realistic and non-realistic elements, historical styles, and the ways in which light, sound, and physical movement interacted with scenic elements.

Part II. How did the set design interact with, support, contradict, or enhance the themes, narrative, and style of the play? Were there moments in the production when visual texts meaningfully overwhelmed linguistic texts? In the end, do you believe the design was successful (thematically, narratively, as a form of spectacle or entertainment, etc.)? Why, or why not?

Evaluation: You will be graded on how well you are able to show a connection between Parts I and II, i.e., how well you are able to describe the design using specific and vivid language, and how well you analyze these design elements in terms of the themes, stories, characters, and actions of the play itself.

In Class Informal Writing

1. Evaluating Evidence: An 'entremet' representing the Conquest of Jerusalem performed before the King of France and the Holy Roman Emperor in Paris, 1378.

Premise: This is the only piece of evidence in our possession about a performance of the *Conquest of Jerusalem* at the court of Charles V. The script at the bottom of the page (Gallic) tells us only the name of the play and that the King was in attendance. This page is from a chronicle (official history, written and illustrated by court historiographers and poets) of Charles' reign.

Research Question: Based on the premise and visual information in the manuscript illumination, what can we conclude about theatre and performance at the court? What conclusions are we unable to make, based on the available evidence? Where else might we look to fill in the gaps of our understanding? Considering these questions, free write for approximately 7-10 minutes. Don't edit yourself. At this stage of a research project there are no "bad" ideas.



Chronique de Charles V, MS. Français, 2813, f.473^v. Bibliothèque Nationale.

2. The State and the Stage: Meaning and Structure

In groups of five students, create a new design of a theatre that would meet the basic needs of either

- an autocratic ruler producing spectacles that express his power to the maximum number of citizens;
- a democratic space that combines ritual and theatre; or
- a stage design that allows itinerant players to mount comic dramas in different public outdoor spaces on different days.

You do not have carbon fuel powered engines, electricity, or computer technology to help produce the spectacle. Nor do you have a source for artificial lighting, so the spaces need to be at least partially out of doors to take advantage of sunlight.

Although the three examples infer ancient Roman and Greek examples, I would like you to avoid copying outright any of the architectural design elements we have learned in class. However, you can certainly let those examples help you think of your new creations. Your rituals and performance traditions should be unique. It might help to imagine your theatre existing in a specific society and/or geography (other than Greek or Roman empires).

This project works best when all the members of each group are able to contribute, cooperate, and listen to each other. You have 40 minutes to create your idea of a theatre structure and we will spend the final 30 minutes of class presenting your ideas to the class. You may use the blackboard to draw diagrams and sketches. Most importantly, be able to explain to the class how very specific elements of the theatre designs serve the needs of your audiences and performers.

3. Evaluating Evidence 2: Early Modern Festival Books

First 20 minutes:

Each group of 4-5 students studies an image. While examining an image from a Festival Book, each member makes a list (individually) of the aspects of the image that they believe are

- a) fanciful or decorative, or
- b) represent realistically a theatrical element that was actually built (or an action/event that actually occurred)

After each member makes a list (quietly), the group will come together and share ideas. Arrive at a consensus about the various elements of the image, and make a master list in two columns: a) imaginative and b) actual.

After each item on the list, write a sentence or two explaining WHY you believe the element is either imaginative or representative. If a consensus about an element of an image cannot be reached, then supply a defense for both points of view.

Final 10 minutes

Each group has about 2 minutes to describe the image to the rest of the class in detail, providing an explanation for the various elements in the image.



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