

Marymount Manhattan College
DANCE COMPOSITION 1
DANC 351
Spring 2013
Monday and Wednesday
10:00AM-11: 20AM

Professors: John Jasperse and Allen Fogelsanger
Email: jjasperse@mmm.edu
Jasperse's Office: N/A
Jasperse's Office Hours: by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Composition 1 is required for all dance BA and BFA candidates. This course will introduce students to the nature of composition. The etymological definition of the word composition as “the action of combining” or “a putting together, connecting, and arranging” will inform our approach. The course will also treat “set” choreography and improvisation as a continuum, and, as such, we will be dealing with both, treating improvisation as compositional choice making in real time. The course will depart with the premise that it is impossible to teach someone to be a choreographer or an artist, but it is possible to teach certain tools which can be of use in that endeavor and to develop skills of analysis and articulation in relationship to movement as well as artistic work.

The semester will be grossly divided into three foci:

1. We will initially focus on the dancing body and, in particular, an introduction of tools in relationship to movement and its attributes. This will include a broad survey of some approaches that could inform movement generation as well as its further development and manipulation inside compositional structures.
2. We will also address some basic structural elements of composition and strategies for how we might put elements together, organize and/or disorganize them, connect them and arrange them.
3. Eventually, we will shift the focus onto the broader question of art making, what it can accomplish, how the endeavor of artistic cultural production sits in relationship to societal culture, and how our compositional choices in our dance making relate to this broader set of concerns.

These foci will not be explored in a purely linear fashion, nor are they mutually exclusive. We will view these concerns as circles that are at times concentric and at other times overlap. While we will start with a focus on the attributes of the dancing body, we will move from one set of concerns to another as they unfold in our process over the semester.

Throughout the course the student will be asked to think and work critically and analytically about the act of composition and the act of perception. A key component will be discussions about what we experience in the work of our colleagues as well as what our intentions are within our own choice making.

Classes will be structured around in-class compositional/improvisational exercises, analysis and discussion in response to in-class showings of choreographic homework assignments, short readings and viewing of seminal works of art on video or in museums as well as that of live performances of practicing artists, and critique and discussion in relationship to those works. The goal of the class is to offer a forum through which students can deeply engage with creation, develop their own artistic voices, and investigate new ways of thinking about form through the lens of choreographic inquiry.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND GOALS:

The following concepts will be introduced and explored through the course of the semester. Priority will be placed on elements within the first broad category with a slightly lesser focus on the second broad category. Concepts within the third category will be addressed according to the time we have and the manner in which those issues organically emerge from our work.

Aspects of movement and potential points of departure for the creation and development of choreographic material: Sensation, Weight, Rhythm, Accent, Syncopation, Dynamics, locomotion, interplay between design shape of movement and the design shape of the body, negative and positive volumes in space, transposition, instructions and task actions, artifice and authenticity, and virtuosity and the pedestrian or quotidian.

Elements of structural or organizational form: Consistency and continuity in relationship to discontinuity, progression, lists, accent in relationship to other elements than rhythm, repetition, recursive elements, figure and ground, reversal and retrograde, juxtaposition, de-familiarization, formation of expectation and rupture, symmetry & asymmetry, organization of time & spatial relationships, and passivity vs. activity and/or subject vs. object, stream of consciousness & flow, and beginnings and endings and coda.

Concepts in relationship to artistic production: Adaptation of organizational forms from outside cultural production; action as itself and the emergence of symbol; refinement of our working definition of the words “meaning” and “understanding” in relationship to our work, to art work, in general, and to dance, in particular; authorship and open source; community and cultural representation; sociological representation in artistic product and relationships of power; history and popular culture; exploration of alternative performance formats beyond frontal viewing reminiscent of the proscenium, and locating and honoring one’s own evolving artistic sensibility.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN CLASS: Class meets twice a week. Many classes will begin with a guided improvisation that will prepare the body for the compositional assignment of the day and/or the homework assignment. Certain classes will focus more on in-class mini studies while other classes will focus more on analyzing and verbalizing the choices made in prepared studies. We will practice giving and receiving feedback and emphasis will be placed on articulating in detail what we notice in each dance. We will also view works of art live or on video to supplement our own investigations. There will be short handouts to read and students are expected to keep a choreographer’s notebook with ongoing self-reflections throughout the class. Your final project will culminate in a group showing, open to the department, and a 300-word program note to accompany your work.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Upon completion of this course students will be able to:

- Apply tools from a compositional tool belt in service of manipulating movement material
- Articulate what is occurring in a dance and be able to analyze what choices a choreographer made and to what (subjective) effect.
- Compare early modern dance’s compositional development with contemporary practices
- Analyze and compare forms and/or conventions utilized within works of art that they encounter.
- Arrange (choreograph) a short dance to be presented in the dance composition showing at the end of the term.

EVALUATION:

Completion of all compositional assignments and your ability to apply the tools we are studying to those assignments will make up 30% of your grade. Completion of all other related homework assignments (readings, journal entries and attending performances), the quality of your participation and attendance will determine your final grade. That will be evaluated through the following criteria: willingness to take risks, positive engagement with the material, your ability to work as a team creating an atmosphere of trust, and completion of written assignments.

30% Completion of all compositional studies

25% In-class participation (physical work, and oral response to readings)

20% Written assignments

25% Attendance

CLOTHING:

Wear comfortable clothes that keep your body warm and relaxed. No dangling jewelry.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: You are allowed 1 excused absence if you call the dance department before 10AM on the day of class with a reasonable explanation. A half letter grade per absence will be deducted from your grade for every absence beyond that one. Absences due to injury or illness or other uncontrollable circumstances, can be made up with additional work if you approach me as soon as an issue arises, and the quality of your participation has been high up until that moment. Otherwise, after the fourth missed class you will fail attendance and after the sixth absence you will fail the course.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Students with disabilities (learning, physical or psychological) who require reasonable accommodations or academic adjustments for a course must be registered with the Office of Disability Services or enrolled in the Academic Access Program. With students' permission, faculty members are notified each semester by CONFIDENTIAL email that a student with documented disabilities is in their class and is eligible for accommodations.

If a student has questions regarding the Office of Disability Services or accommodations, please contact Diana Nash, Director of Academic Access & Disability Services, Room 706i, 7th floor Main Building, dnash@mmm.edu or 212-774-0724.

MATERIALS:

The course will contain excerpts from books and articles as well as audio/visual material. These will be posted on Blackboard or be given to you as handouts.

A list of performances to potentially see live:

Jennifer Monson, Live Dancing Archive @ The Kitchen 512 West 19th Street, New York, NY 10011
February 14–16, 8pm February 21–23, 8pm

DraftWork PAUL MATTESON / BUCK WANNER Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church, 10th Street and 2nd Avenue, February 16, 2013, Saturday at 3:00PM. Free and open to the public!

Yasuko Yokoshi, Bell, New York Live Arts, 219 West 19th Street, New York, NY 10011, Sat. 3/16 - Sat. 3/23 at 7:30 p.m.

Netherlands Dance Theater, The Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue @ 19th Street, New York, NY 10011
April 10-12, 2103

Royal Ballet of Cambodia, Brooklyn Academy of Music Opera House, May 2 – 4, 2013

Video viewing:

James Byrne videotape "Set and Reset, Version 1" by Trisha Brown, available for viewing at the New York Public Library Dance Collection [22 minutes]

Mette Ingvarstsen and Jefta van Dinther's "It's in the Air"
<https://vimeo.com/27504772> [47 min.]

Jeaning Durning "*ining*" [Approx. 1 hr.]

Final Showing

Thursday, 5/16 10-11:30am in Great Hall
Participation Mandatory