

THEA 333: Devising

Mon/Wed, 10:00-11:50am

Performing Arts Building Room 210 (“The Rehearsal Room”)

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Office Hours: Mondays, 12:30-2:30, and by appointment (reserve a meeting time at elliottleffler.youcanbook.me, or just walk in)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Throughout most of the 20th century (and arguably for much longer than that), theatre in the US and Europe was anchored by the playwright. The other artists – directors, actors, designers, dramaturgs, etc – looked to the written word of the playwright with tremendous deference. Indeed, most theatre in the US still exists within this paradigm. But the paradigms are changing. Increasingly, theatre-makers are developing their performances without a pre-written script, through a process called *devising*. In this class, you will explore what it means to work within a devised context – conducting research and developing original material for performance, in constant, ongoing negotiation and experimentation with the other members of an ensemble.

Devising, by definition, puts its artists in uncharted territory. At the outset of any devising experience, I usually feel both tremendously excited and at least a little terrified. I usually anticipate a tremendous amount of work ahead of me – but I never can be sure *how* much work. I never can tell exactly what the chances are that the project will succeed, or what the scope of it will be. I look around me at my collaborators-to-be, knowing that the experiences we share may cause us to feel, at turns, extremely intimate and extremely alienated from one another. But I also have the sense that we might accomplish something truly incredible together. I feel that way again at the outset of this course. As usual, we find ourselves in uncharted territory, and there’s a lot that I *don’t* know about exactly what we will accomplish together over the next 13 weeks.

Here’s what I *do* know. This is a class in which we will toggle back and forth between two modes of working. In the first mode, you will be “students” and I will be a “professor.” I will assign homework and plan class, and I will expect that you come ready to thoughtfully and spiritedly discuss the readings and viewings. I will share with you my knowledge of this way of working, and I will encourage you to share your own insights and wisdom. We will reflect on the creative work we have done together (more on that creative work in a moment), and consider how it is similar to and different from other ways of devising that we have read about. This mode will probably account for about 60% of our time together, and it will culminate with each student writing a detailed proposal for a future devised project that they might spearhead.

And then, in the second mode, we will be artists. At times, perhaps I will function as a director, and you will be performers. At other times, I will join you as a performer, and perhaps one of you will step out and be a director. At some times, I may step out entirely, functioning as a fly-on-the-wall so I can best help you to reflect on the work afterwards. We will function as though we are devising a piece of theatre together, though we will do so without the pressure of deadlines or public showings. Once we get comfortable working as devisers, you will each recruit other performers – students not enrolled in this class – and you will direct *them* as though *they* are a devising ensemble. In this second mode, in which we function as artists, the work expected of you will be creative in nature. You will conduct research on the topic of our show (see below for more detail on this), and you will develop short vignettes and sequences that relate to the topic. This mode will probably account for about 40% of our time together. If you so choose, we can decide to share some of the work we generate publicly, but we don't have to.

When we devise, the topic of our imaginary show is climate change. This was chosen back in December, in consultation with the students who were enrolled in the course at that time. So, the research we do, and the theatrical material we create, will all relate to climate change. What we *don't* know yet, and what we will soon figure out together, is what specific questions about climate change our show will ask. That is part of our journey!

Students should have taken *at least one* of the following courses as a prerequisite for this class: Theatre 100, Theatre 160, Theatre 161, Theatre 202, Theatre 203, Theatre 210, Theatre 215, Theatre 223, Dance 112, or Dance 252. Students who have significant experiences in the arts but have not taken any of these courses can also seek individual permission from the instructor.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS AND ASSESSMENTS

You will be evaluated based on five major components:

1. Class Citizenship (50%)
2. Research Assignments (10%)
3. Out-of-Class Creative Assignments (10%)
4. Written Assignments and Reflection Papers (15%)
5. Final Visioning Project (15%)

1. Class Citizenship: Attendance, Preparation, and Class Participation (50%)

Active, open-minded, adventurous participation is the cornerstone of this course. I'll ask you to participate verbally (in class discussions) and physically (in games, improvisational exercises and performances). Through this participation, we will collectively build a supportive classroom environment based on trust, support, risk-taking, and the quest for intellectual discovery. You will help to build this

environment through your investment in activities, discussions and performances; your preparedness for class; and the insight and generosity of your feedback for your peers.

Attendance and Punctuality

Regular attendance and punctuality are prerequisites for the kind of active participation that this course requires. I expect you to attend every class, and to show up a few minutes early so we can start on time. Absences and tardiness will negatively impact your grade, but more importantly, they will negatively impact class dynamics and others' learning.

Preparation (Readings and Viewings)

Coming to class prepared includes doing the readings (or watching the videos, or listening to the podcasts) and always bringing your relevant texts with you. Generally, I will assign a reading assignment for each class – especially in the first 6 weeks, which are more discussion-based. I expect that you will read these carefully and thoughtfully; you should always be prepared to ask and respond to provocative questions about these texts.

Preparation (Dress)

We will be moving in this class and often sitting on the floor, particularly once we get into the phase in which we are devising regularly. In this part of the course, please wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing in which you can move freely. Think sweats or workout clothes—nothing that will restrict or inhibit your movement by being too tight, too baggy, or too revealing. No jeans, please. Because certain types of footwear can also be constricting, I ask that everyone remove their shoes at the door, and participate in class barefoot. Please see me if you have any questions or concerns about clothing.

In the first 6 weeks of the term, you do not need to wear special clothes for this class (ie, jeans are ok at this stage), but there may be some times when we get up “on our feet,” so be ready for that and please don't wear any clothes that are *too* restrictive.

2. Research Assignments (15%)

Devising often includes conducting extensive research on the topic of the show. This might include online research, library-based research, interview-based research, and/or ethnographic research. Doing this research thoughtfully and thoroughly informs and inspires ideas for performance. There will be at least one time, and potentially several times throughout the semester, when you are expected to conduct research on the topic of the show (climate change), and to share what you learn with the class (either in presentations, brief write-ups, or reading assignments that you make for the rest of us).

3. Out-of-Class Creative Assignments (30%)

Much of the creative work you do will happen during class hours, as the students in this class function as an ensemble. For a stretch of this course, I predict that class time will feel a little bit like rehearsals for a devised show. However, you will also have a few assignments wherein you will be asked to work outside of class, as the director of a small devised ensemble that you will put together. You'll rehearse with your group outside of class and then bring back a short performance vignette that you have developed. I expect that these performances are thoughtfully developed, artistically composed, and tightly executed. The class may then choose to develop some of these vignettes further – adding more design elements, more text, more actors, more choreography, etc.

This means that some of your homework time for this class will have to be coordinated with peers. You'll have to carefully reserve blocks of time when you can rehearse together. If you have concerns about your availability to meet and work with your peers, please see me about those concerns this week.

4. Written Assignments (15%)

I will periodically ask you to submit written assignments. Some of these may be reflections on readings or viewings. Some may be preparatory writing that will inform our devising together. Some of these may be assignments in which you reflect on your devising experiences. These are opportunities to “zoom out,” to think about what you are learning, and to consider the ways we are working in light of the myriad ways that devising ensembles *can* work together. You will submit these assignments via the class moodle. (I will write up a detailed assignment description as each of these approaches.)

5. Final Visioning Project (15%)

The final project for this class will ask you to envision a devising project of your own design. You will have to articulate a vision for a performance around which you can gather an ensemble of collaborators, and you'll map out the contours of your process. As you do so, you'll draw inspiration both from our own process, from other processes you may have been a part of, and from readings/viewings/discussions we've done in this class that provide insight into alternative choices. (I will write up a detailed assignment description as the end of semester approaches.) We probably won't talk about this assignment much until about Week 10, but I encourage you to keep this project in your mind throughout the whole semester and to continually consider what kind of devising work *you* might want to do. I welcome conversations in my office that anticipate this assignment at any time.

IMPORTANT CLASS POLICIES

Technology We Will Use

You can access the class website by logging into moodle.reed.edu. I will use this website to post readings, to collect assignments, and potentially, to provide a digital forum for out-of-class conversations. You are also welcome to use the class website to post notices for one another (and the easiest way to do this is to use the “news forum” feature at the top of the page). Please ensure that you are able to access, post documents to, and print from the site. If you are not able to do so, please contact the Help Desk of Computer User Services: 503-777-7525.

Additionally, I will sometimes email class announcements to your Reed College email addresses. I expect that you are checking email regularly (at least once per day, during the week). If you prefer another address, please forward your Reed email to that address.

Finally, I will also sometimes video-record our class. This is common in the devising context; it enables us to document our experiments so that we can return to them, learn from them, and recreate particular moments. If there are no objections, I will make this footage available on our moodle site for the students who are enrolled in this class to review. I do so with the absolute expectation that this footage is *exclusively* used for learning/devising purposes, and that it is never shared with any friends outside of this class. Casually sharing this footage in a social context (without the permission of all people depicted) or via the internet is, in my mind, a profound violation of Reed’s honor principle.

Technology We Will Not Use

While technology offers wonderful opportunities to enhance our learning, it also sometimes creates distractions. We live in a hyperlinked world that tempts us to check our email regularly, chat with friends online, surf the net, tap into our social networks, etc. Yet the study of theatre offers us the possibility to be fully present to each other – to be focused and viscerally connected rather than digitally dispersed. Therefore, I want to de-center laptops, tablets, and phones in this classroom. They will not be *strictly* forbidden, and there will be times when you can use them, but I ask you to habitually keep them in your bags until a particular curricular need for them arises. When that need arises, I expect that your use of that technology is strictly related to class. I view web-surfing, emailing, social networking, online chatting, and texting during class to be violations of Reed’s honor principle.

For more on why I’ve decided to de-center laptops, please see <http://tinyurl.com/nmgfz4s> and <http://tinyurl.com/lrm8f94>.

Also, as social media expands its presence in our lives, it can have a chilling effect on what people in learning communities are willing to say to one another in person. People are increasingly fearful of negative comments about them written on facebook, twitter,

and other social media sites. This can lead us all to being tight-lipped, afraid of saying or doing anything that others might critique or mock online. If that happens, it cheapens the value of the course for everyone. I want this classroom to be a place for emotional and intellectual risk-taking, which is only possible if we all agree not to expose one another online. For this reason, I ask students to refrain from posting anything that might be interpreted as negative about the members of this learning community on social media, and to commit to working through disagreements and tense moments in person.

Academic Integrity

In academic circles, whenever we reference ideas that others have developed, we always follow a strict protocol in order to give those people credit for those ideas. This is an act of humility and integrity. I expect that all of your reflective and analytical writing is your own, original work, and that when you quote or paraphrase any source in order to develop your ideas, you carefully cite that source using MLA format. (For more details on MLA format, I suggest consulting the excellent website of Purdue University's Online Writing Lab [<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>].) When you reference ideas or quote sources in creative writing that you might do in the course of devising, you don't always need to use MLA format, but you must find creative ways to attribute those ideas and words to the person/people who developed them. Reference all sources you use, including books, websites, lecture notes, or any thoughts that are not your own. I take issues of academic integrity very seriously. I do not anticipate plagiarism and have not encountered it at this institution, but if I do, I will need to give zeros on the assignments and report the violator(s) to the Reed College Academic Misconduct Board.

Late Work

Due dates help us stay together on our creative journey, and I will enforce them in order to keep us moving forward as one community. I will penalize late work by docking a half-letter grade (5% of the total grade) for each day that written assignments are turned in late. This means that if a paper is due Thursday, and you turn it in on Friday, you would receive an A-/B+ for A level work, or a B for A-/B+ work. Similarly, I will dock a half-letter grade for each day that presentations or performances are late. If you are supposed to perform or present on Thursday and you end up performing the subsequent Tuesday, five days will have passed, meaning a 25% reduction in the grade that you would receive. This is a substantial reduction, which the class community needs because late performance work will significantly derail our forward momentum as a group.

Occasionally, in extenuating circumstances, I do grant extensions for written work. If you believe you have an extenuating circumstance that would qualify you for an extension, please consult with me *at least three days in advance of the deadline*. We can discuss this possibility in person, and then I will ask you to email me a formal, written request that includes: (1) the reason you are seeking an extension, (2) the date and time at which I can expect to receive your work. Please understand that I grant these requests

very selectively, and that requesting an extension does not necessarily mean that I will grant it.

How to miss class responsibly:

Consistent attendance is of absolute importance, and I expect to see you at every class. However, students occasionally have extenuating circumstances, and they need to miss class. If this only happens once or twice in a semester, it is acceptable, and the impact on your grade will be relatively small. When this happens, it is your responsibility to ascertain what you missed and what you need to do for subsequent classes. I suggest you do the following:

1. If possible, before the class, check in with me and let me know not to expect you. This can help me prepare for class and I will appreciate your communication. Please don't ask me if it is "okay" to miss class; rather, if you are concerned about my reaction, please simply communicate to me that it is an extenuating circumstance and that it will not become a habit.
2. After the class, please begin by checking in with a peer, and asking what you missed and what upcoming assignments have been explained. Ask them when they are not rushed, and can give you a full and thoughtful answer. If you don't get a thorough and thoughtful answer from them, ask another peer.
3. If you have specific questions for me, based on your conversations with your peers, feel free to ask me. The best way to ask me these questions is to come to my office hours. The second-best way to ask me is to email me. If/when you email me, please try to be specific about your concerns. It is better to ask a question like "What's the fundamental difference between Tectonic's process and Norma Bowles's process?" than "What did I miss?"

A Note on Correspondence

My office door is open to you, as is my email inbox. I look forward to getting to know you over the term and beyond. Here are a few rules of thumb will help us on our journey:

- Please take advantage of my office hours. When you have a quick, technical question (ie, clarifying an assignment), email is a great medium, but when you have more substantial issues to discuss, I highly and emphatically prefer that we communicate in person. I look forward to discussing your projects, ideas, concerns, and questions around the little table in my office.
- Please be conscientious and efficient in your email correspondence. If you have a question, please give me at least 36 hours to respond. Emails received over the weekend might not be responded to until Monday morning.
- You can always just show up at my office hours unannounced, but there's also a risk that someone else will be with me. If you go to elliottleffler.youcanbook.me, you can specifically book some time with me during office hours, and then you can ensure you'll

have priority at that time.

- If you would like a recommendation letter (now or in the future), please give me at least three weeks notice, as well as detailed information about the program/fellowship/award for which you are applying.

Accommodating Differences and Disabilities

Students have diverse needs and abilities, and I want for this class to be accessible to all enrolled students. When students communicate with me about the accommodations they need, I am usually able to build in appropriate variations and options for assignments. Then, when I announce to the class that there are multiple ways to complete a particular task, students can all make a variety of choices about how they can best challenge and stretch themselves, keeping in mind that learning and growing often inherently involves some discomfort but should always be safe.

Therefore, I welcome individual conversations with students (either at office hours or another time we can arrange) about their learning styles and any reasonable accommodations they might need. Ideally, we should have those conversations early in the semester. As I learn more about the particular needs of a group of students, I can offer increasingly appropriate options for the assignments I give and the exercises I lead.

In addition to meeting with me, if you have (or suspect you have) a documented disability that needs reasonable accommodation, I encourage you to contact the Office of Disability Support Services (disability-services@reed.edu or 503-517-7921). Often, students who need accommodations can maximize their success through a combination of direct conversation with faculty and additional support through DSS.

OTHER COLLEGE RESOURCES AND DEPARTMENT POLICIES TO NOTE

Reserving the Rehearsal Room for Rehearsals

To effectively prepare for class, you will sometimes need to find a space to rehearse. I encourage you to use the Rehearsal Room (our classroom) for this purpose, and you can reserve time in the rehearsal room by using the sign-out sheet posted on the bulletin board immediately outside the main entrance to the room. Please abide by the posted rules for signing out the space, and sign it out only when you really plan to use it. If you have questions about this process, you can see me, or dept administrator Charlie Wilcox.

The DoJo (Writing Assistance)

Writing assistance is available through The DoJo (Dorothy Johansen House). Drop-in writing tutoring is available Sunday-Thursday from 6-10 pm. Students can also contact the DoJo via David Gruber at 503/517-7722 to seek general academic counseling.

COURSE SCHEDULE

This section of the syllabus provides an outline of what you can expect to experience throughout the semester. However, I believe that learning occurs best when teachers have the flexibility to adapt their plans in light of students' responses and questions. This, therefore, is my attempt to share with you what I *think* will happen from week to week. It is subject to change, based on my assessment of our collective needs. Each class, I will clarify the exact assignment for the subsequent class.

<p>Monday, January 22</p> <p>Introduction to the class and the learning community.</p> <p>Video: <i>Devising The American Family</i></p> <p>HW for 1/24: complete Syllabus assignment, read Rich Brown's article on moment work, listen to podcast featuring Barbara Pitts McAdams</p>	<p>Wednesday, January 24</p> <p>Risk-taking, capacity-building, and ensemble-building</p> <p>Experimenting with Moment Work</p> <p>HW for 1/29: Ashlin Hatch's Reed College Senior Thesis (Chapter 2), Selections from Gill Lamden's <i>Devising</i></p>
<p>Monday, January 29</p> <p>Risk-taking, capacity-building, and ensemble-building</p> <p>Drawing connections and distinctions among the many devising strategies analyzed by Hatch and Lamden</p> <p>Video: <i>Devising Gilgamesh</i></p> <p>HW for 1/31: <i>Climate Change for Beginners</i> by Dean Goodwin (Ch 2) and "The Uninhabitable Earth" by David Wallace-Wells</p>	<p>Wednesday, January 31</p> <p>Discussing the science and the repercussions of climate change; Imagining how a devised performance might address these issues</p> <p>HW for 2/5: Selections from <i>Devising Performance</i> by Dierdre Heddon and Jane Milling</p>
<p>Monday, February 5</p> <p>Discussing the variety of devising strategies we have read about and exploring how we might use them in our own work</p> <p>Video: <i>Woza Albert!</i></p> <p>HW for 2/7: Selections from <i>This Changes Everything</i> by Naomi Klein</p>	<p>Wednesday, February 7</p> <p>Discussing <i>Woza Albert</i> and <i>This Changes Everything</i>; Thinking about climate change as devisers</p> <p>HW for 2/12: Norma Bowles's and Mary Zimmerman's articles about devising strategies</p>

<p>Monday, February 12</p> <p>Brief discussion about the Bowles and Zimmerman articles</p> <p>Video: <i>How to End Poverty</i></p> <p>HW for 2/14: Selections from <i>Strangers in their Own Land</i> by Arlie Hochschild</p>	<p>Wednesday, February 14</p> <p>Discussion of <i>How to End Poverty</i>; Continuing to brainstorm about our own devised work</p> <p>Video: <i>Every Year, Every Day, I am Walking</i></p> <p>HW for 2/19: Selections from <i>Devising Theatre with Stan's Café</i> by Mark Crossley and James Yarker</p>
<p>Monday, February 19</p> <p>Discussion of all the videos we have seen, and the variety of aesthetics that are possible, in relation to all the readings we have done about devising, and the strategies we have encountered thus far</p> <p>HW for 2/21: Jack's reading assignment about climate change</p>	<p>Wednesday, February 21</p> <p>Discussion about climate change to be led by Jack (could include "on our feet" work but doesn't have to)</p> <p>HW for 2/26: Erin's reading assignment about climate change</p>
<p>Monday, February 26</p> <p>Discussion about climate change to be led by Erin (could include "on our feet" work but doesn't have to)</p> <p>HW for 2/28: Emma's reading assignment about climate change</p>	<p>Wednesday, February 28</p> <p>Discussion about climate change to be led by Emma (could include "on our feet" work but doesn't have to)</p> <p>HW for 3/5: Writing Assignment</p>
<p>Monday, March 5</p> <p>On Our Feet, Day 1</p> <p>HW for 3/7: begin gathering independent ensembles</p>	<p>Wednesday, March 7</p> <p>On Our Feet, Day 2 (with a guest artist)</p> <p>HW for 3/19: bring in a "moment"</p>
<p>SPRING BREAK, 3/12-3/16</p>	<p>SPRING BREAK, 3/12-3/16</p>
<p>Monday, March 19</p> <p>On Our Feet, Day 3</p> <p>Mid-Semester Reflection</p> <p>HW for 3/21: TBD</p>	<p>Wednesday, March 21</p> <p>On Our Feet, Day 4</p> <p>HW for 3/26: written reflection on our devising work thus far</p>

<p>Monday, March 26</p> <p>On Our Feet, Day 5</p> <p>HW for 3/28: begin working with independent ensembles</p>	<p>Wednesday March 28</p> <p>On Our Feet, Day 6</p> <p>First Discussion of Final Visioning Project</p> <p>HW for 4/2: TBD</p>
<p>Monday, April 2</p> <p>On Our Feet, Day 7 (Elliot absent for Passover)</p> <p>HW for 4/4: TBD</p>	<p>Wednesday, April 4</p> <p>On Our Feet, Day 8: Sharing work from independent ensembles (round 1)</p> <p>HW for 4/9: written reflection on devising work thus far</p>
<p>Monday, April 9</p> <p>On Our Feet, Day 9</p> <p>HW for 4/11: TBD</p>	<p>Wednesday, April 11</p> <p>On Our Feet, Day 10</p> <p>HW for 4/16: TBD</p>
<p>Monday, April 16</p> <p>On Our Feet, Day 11: Sharing work from independent ensembles (round 2)</p> <p>HW for 4/18: TBD</p>	<p>Wednesday April 18</p> <p>Reflecting on Our Work</p> <p>HW for 4/23: TBD</p>
<p>Monday, April 23</p> <p>Reflecting on Our Work</p> <p>HW for 4/25: TBD</p>	<p>Wednesday, April 25</p> <p>Reflecting On Our Work</p> <p>HW for May 7: Complete Final Visioning Project</p>
<p>MONDAY, MAY 7, 6-9 pm: Our tentative “Final Exam” Period (Date and time to be confirmed or changed by Reed College later in the semester)</p> <p>Sharing of independent projects; semester reflections</p>	