New York University
Gestures, Movement, Literature

Professor Lourdes Dávila
19 University Place,
(212) 998-3831
lourdes.davila@nyu.edu
Office Hours: All students will set an appointment to meet with the professor during the first week of classes. Professor offers wide arrangement of office hours for students and students should sign up in the departmental website. Students must meet after midterm paper to review midterm and before final to approve thesis topic and outline. [http://as.nyu.edu/spanish/undergraduate/declare.html]

Course Description:

Working at the space of articulation between dance, literature and politics, this course looks at movement(s) and dance as a key element with which to read transformative moments of history, culture, politics, and philosophy. How do philosophers use the body dancing as a metaphor for thought? How do we read the body dancing before Columbus’ arrival as the first archive of knowledge and resistance? How does the dancing body enter the stage of race relations in 19th century Cuba? What impact does US modern dance have in the political history of the nation and how is it that a Mexican, José Limón, stands as one of the leading figures in US modern dance? Why is it that political movements use the term “movement” to speak of a politics and what impact does that have on the political histories of bodies? The course will include texts by Cirilo Villaverde, García Lorca, Luis Palés Matos, Alejo Carpentier, Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Andrés Caicedo, Claudia Salazar and Mario Bellatin; the films of Almodóvar, flamenco dance and the dances of José Limón, Martha Graham and Pina Bausch, Oscar Araiz and Alicia Díaz. The theoretical and philosophical bases will be provided by Nietzsche, Agamben, Ranciére, Marie Bardet, Lepecki and Badiou, all of whom talk specifically about the art of movement, about movement and politics, or about movement and dance as metaphor for thought. The course understands as a premise that we can use the history of dance and movement as a way of understanding history and politics in Latin America.

Class Objectives—Throughout the course

1. We will examine the way in which literature uses dance and physical gestures to produce connections between movement and thought, or to speak about the relationship between art, politics and culture.
2. We will analyze and write about dance performances in order to determine what bodies in movement know, do, and communicate.
3. We will observe the specific ways in which philosophy and politics uses the body and the body in movement to establish categories of thought and being in the world.
4. We will consider the question of translation of literary works into dance.
5. We will learn the vocabulary we need to observe and decipher the meaning of movement in the art of dance and, while doing so, we will create a simple map for the history of modern and contemporary dance.

Requisites:

a. Class participation: Read all the texts assigned for class, and be ready to participate in our class conversations. (10 %)
b. First written comment. (10 %)
c. Written comment/presentation. You will do two oral presentations (which will consist of a critical analysis of a portion of the text or dance assigned and the development of a series of questions for class discussion). In addition to the oral presentation, you will present a written 2/3 page comment (see instructions at the end of the syllabus) (30 %)
d. 1 midterm paper with revisions, responding to a particular question provided by the professor (5-6 pages, 20 %)
d. 1 final paper (10-12 pages, 30 %)

Readings: (you can purchase all the readings in the NYU bookstore or in internet-all other readings will be available through NYU Classes)

Purchase:
Mario Bellatin  
Andrés Caicedo  
Claudia Salazar

Disability Disclosure Statement: Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosecsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Note: One of the classes will be substituted with a dance performance and written commentary on the dance performance

1. Week 1: 

Introduction to the class: What is movement?
For this class, bring in a paragraph to a page description of what you think Movement is, and the differences between gesture, movement, and dance.
Lourdes Dávila, “Turn to Movement,” Introduction to Issue 6 of Esferas. (https://wp.nyu.edu/esferas/2016/05/06/issue-6-spring-
2016/ )

Dance and Identity in Golden Age Literature:
Cervantes, The Little Gypsy Girl (NYU Classes)

Number of pages: 80

2. Week 2:

Dancing in the Colonies: Writers Use Dance to frame Identity and Otherness. Main Question: What can We Read through and beyond their Words?
Paul Scolieri, Dancing the New World. Aztecs, Spaniards, and the Choreography of the Conquest, Intro, (NYU Classes); Bartolomé de las Casas (NYU Classes); González Fernández de Oviedo (NYU Classes).

Number of pages: 90

Assignment for week 3: Professor will hand out sample commentary and instructions on how to write a commentary. First written commentary for all due on Week 3. Commentary will be minimum 2 typed pages and maximum 3 pages (spacing 1.5). Assignment due electronically on the day of the assignment.

3. Week 3:

Main theoretical approaches to the relationship between dance and thought, and dance as an understanding of culture and society:
Philosophy looks at dance and its relationship to thought: Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra (selections); Badiou, “Dance as Metaphor for Thought;” Vilém Flusser Gestures (selections) NYU Classes (Criticism/Essays)

How can dance be a metaphor and/or model of society? Andrew Hewitt, Social Choreography. Ideology as performance in Dance and Every Day Movement--Introduction (NYU Classes).

Number of Pages: 120

4. Week 4

Social Movements in Cuba through Dance and Music. What Spaces Become Available in Society through Sance and Music?
Cirilo Villaverde, Cecilia Valdes, or El Angel Hill.
FYS
Professor Lourdes Dávila

Gestures, Movement, and Literature

(selections; please read summary before reading selections); Cuban Ballet: dance of Dolores Santa Cruz in “Cecilia Valdés.”

Read interview with Caridad Martínez in Esferas, issue 6. (https://wp.nyu.edu/esferas/2016/05/06/issue-6-spring-2016/) [Possible visit with Caridad Martínez, now at Alvin Ailey]

Pages: 130

5. Week 5

Negrista Movements, the Framing of the Body, and Dance:
Luis Palés Matos, Afro-Caribbean poetry, selections (NYU Classes); Mayra Santos Febres, Carmen Cordero, poems (NYU Classes);
Essay: José Piedra, “Hip Poetics” (NYU Classes)

Rosario Ferré, “Maquinolandera” (Dammed Love and Other Stories-NYU Classes):
Rumberos (Documentary about Cuban Rumba)

Professor will hand out questions and topics for the midterm paper. Pages: 5 typed pages, spacing. 1.5. Assignment due electronically on the day of the assignment

Number of Pages: 65

6. Week 6

Dance Traditions and Contemporary Identity Politics:
Alicia Díaz, Deep Listening. Watch video in NYU Classes, read her article in Esferas (https://wp.nyu.edu/esferas/2016/05/06/issue-6-spring-2016/)

15 pages + videography

7. Week 7

Midterm Paper Due
Movement in Poetry
Federico García Lorca, “Conference about el duende” Deep Song (poems-selection) [NYU Classes]

Intermediality and Moving into Politics: Dancers Respond to the Spanish Civil War
Martha Graham, Deep Song (dance-NYU Classes);
8. Week 8

Professor returns midterm paper with comments: all students must meet with professor to go over comments before handing in final draft. Students will not get a grade for their papers in this return. In meeting, students will also discuss final project.

Photography and Archive: Archiving Dance Through Photographs (we will visit the Lincoln Center Archive for José Limón and Martha Graham)

No pages; class will convene at the archives in the Lincoln Center Library

9. Week 9

Final draft of midterm paper due.

Fixed Myths Move beyond Their Structure:
José Limón, “La Malinche” (dance in NYU Classes);
Readings: Bernal Díaz del Castillo; Octavio Paz. (NYU Classes: Bernal Díaz del Castillo, chapter on la Malinche; Octavio Paz, “The sons of the Malinche”)

Photography, Dance and the Archive; Pages: 110

10. Week 10

Globalization and Rite of Spring; the Many Uses of Rite of Spring in Dance and Literature:

Pedro Almodóvar Talk to Her; Pina Bausch; Pina (Wim Wenders-available in Netflix)
“Café Müller”; “Masurca Fogo”

Rite of Spring and the Politics of Dancing
Heteropolitics: Brandstetter
Rite of Spring-Pina Bausch
Rite of Spring-Paul Taylor
Rite of Spring- Oscar Araiz

Pages 140

11. Week 11

Tango and literature. Themes: Defining the National through its Culture; Populism and the Popular in Argentina
Borges, “Evaristo Carriego” “History of Tango;”
Cortázar, “Gates of Heaven” (NYU Classes)

Boxing, Movement, Literature, Dance
Cortázar, “Torito;” Oscar Araiz, “Torito”

75 pages

12. Week 12

**Counter Culture, Counter Movements, and Dance. Beyond the Ideas and Ideals of Revolutionary Movements**
Andrés Caicedo, Live Forever!

Pages 280

13. Week 13

**Movement and Agency: Is Movement Immanent and a Source of Agency Or Is It Controlled from Outside?**
Giorgio Agamben, “What is Movement” (NYU Classes);
Claudia Salazar, Blood of Dawn.

Pages: 210

14. Week 14

**Dance and the End of Culture?**
Mario Bellatin, Jacobo Reloaded;
Oscar Naters, Jacob the Mutant (video of dance-NYU Classes)

Pages: 130 + videography

15. Week 15

Preliminary presentations and writing workshop for final

**Final Paper due on the Monday after the final class**

**The Written Commentaries:**
As you can see, the course has no exams. In their place, you will present, on the indicated class, a written commentary on the texts, film, or dance assigned for class. The commentary must reflect an analysis of the cultural object chosen, thinking specifically about the ideas discussed in class about gesture, movement, and dance. I will provide a sample commentary and talk about how commentaries are written during the second week of classes. You will all write a commentary for the third week of classes and then will present two other written commentaries depending on the readings you choose in the program. On the day in which
you present your commentary, you will bring questions for the class and will assist in orchestrating class discussion with me. Class discussion will depend largely on the questions that students bring to the classroom.

**Length of the commentary:** The commentary must be approximately two to three pages long, one-and-a-half-space, in Times New Roman, 12 pts. font

**Content of the commentary:** The commentary should be an analysis of the material read.

As you read the text or texts, underline the key phrases or sentences that in your opinion support a given theme. If we are working with critical essays, your analysis should summarize and question the criticism, by elaborating analytical questions and using dance and movement as your main topic. If you are working with film or dance videography, you will seek to find the narrative for the dance and wonder about the possible meanings behind gestures, movement, and choreography, their relationship to history and politics. Your response can be a written answer to a question you elaborate yourself. In all cases, each response should show knowledge of the materials read up to that point in the class.

During class, we will be working on your analysis and questions and on the questions and comments presented by others. You will turn in the first draft of your comment electronically; I will return it to you (also electronically) for you to incorporate the comments presented in class. You will have one week to return your revised comment.

Please note that we are dealing with a very novel topic for which there might not be much specific criticism. The commentaries are not mini research projects, but rather a way to advance the construction of a history of the presence of dance in literature, and the literatures of dance as they relate to social discourses.

**Midterm Essay**
5-6 Pages, professor will present possible topics in advance

**Final Paper**
You need to get approval for your final paper in advance. You have several options for this paper, some listed here, but you can suggest a topic that you may want to explore. First of all, you will need to decide whether you want to analyze a literary work, a dance group or performance, a movie, a period or issue in the world of contemporary dance. The recommendations below are not unique: please make an appointment to see me before you begin your research.

I- You can continue your exploration of a topic and a work we discussed in class, as long as you go beyond our class conversations and bring in new criticism (at least three additional sources). Throughout the course, I will be mentioning possible expansions and additional explorations available with each particular topic.
II - Analysis of a dance company in NY with a relationship to Latino/a, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Spain. You can focus on several elements: a specific dance piece, especially if the work has a literary source or if the piece seeks to comment on Caribbean, Latin American or Spanish themes and history; you can choose to write a series of interviews, along with archive research in order to configure a narrative about the company’s place in dance in the City; you can explore the Hispanic presence in classical ballet companies; you can choose to work on archival photography and speak about the role of the archive vis a vis what is an ephemeral art form. You can look at the links below for different dance companies:

1. Ballet Hispanico
2. BAAD: Arthur Avilés, director.
3. Bailarines hispanos en Nueva York en compañías de baile clásico
4. José Limón Dance Company
   [http://limon.org/dance-company/](http://limon.org/dance-company/)
5. Viveca Vázquez

III - Literature that relates to the field of dance

1. Miguel de Cervantes, *El retablo de las maravillas*
2. Paul Valéry, *L’Ame et la Danse*, 1923, teatro (The pdf of the original and the translation into English are in *NYU Classes*).
3. Fernando Ortiz, *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba*, 1951 (Ensayo)
5. Manuel Muñoz, “Zigzagger” (Latino literature), in *NYU Classes*.
6. Ana Castillo, *Peel My Love Like an Onion*.
7. Roni Denholtz, *Dance with Me.*

IV- Movies:

1. Pedro Almodóvar, *The Flower of my Secret*
4. Randa Haines, *Dance with Me.*
5. Guy Ferland, *Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights*

V- Expand on the philosophical study of the use of dance and movement in literature, looking at least at three critical texts about dance.
Selected Bibliography


