

CANES 373
Meets with Theatre 219/619 and ILS 254

Theatre Plays with Science

Professor Mike Vanden Heuvel



This is an interdisciplinary course that brings together students from the Classical Humanities track in CANES, Theatre and Drama, the Integrated Liberal Studies program, and various science departments – making for a dynamic classroom of scientists and non-scientists, artists and non-artists, right-brainers and left-brainers (tho' we learn that model is out of date in the neurosciences!).

The aim is to introduce students to different ways of encountering Western science and art from the Classical age to the present so that one can learn to think critically about them: about why these two domains have for so long been seen as separate and even mutually excluding, and how one might bring them into some sort of dialogue. While the subtitle of the course suggests the main trajectory ("Theatre Plays with Science"), we will not restrict our study to dramatic texts alone: we'll look at the related forms of performance taking place in site-specific art, installation art, digital performance, immersive theatre, etc.

Students will read or view a variety of plays and performances that address scientific themes, concepts, characters and debates. We'll range across a number of scientific fields: physics, chemistry, relativity and quantum science, cognitive neuroscience, evolutionary biology and genetics, among others. As well, we'll view and discuss more contemporary multimedia (sometimes virtual) art/theatre/installations with scientific form and/or content. These primary materials will be supplemented by short, layperson-accessible essays on scientific ideas and history, sometimes supplemented by videos. The course will be delivered via a mixture of lecture, discussion, video and image presentations, a good deal of small group peer work, and some interactive lab activities that combine scientific and artistic pursuits. Much of the learning is student-driven, and there will be room for you to pursue collaborative research and projects with students from different backgrounds and majors.