

Course Syllabus: TFMS300.01
Modern Theater
J. Klein

Spring Semester 2015
TR 10:00-11:50 am, MH 111
Prerequisites: TFMS200 or consent of
instructor
4 credits

APPROACH: As the second course in the theater history sequence, the subject for study will be the recent sources and forms of contemporary theater beginning with the advent of Realism in Western drama. Students will examine the transformation of performance into new venues, styles, and codes as a consequence of political conflicts, technological developments, social movements, intercultural influences, and critical theories. Topics will include Naturalism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Epic Theater, Absurdist Theater, Guerilla Theater, Performance Art, Feminist Theater, LGBT Theater, Cultural Pluralism, and the major innovators of modern theater practices.

The methods, materials, and problems associated with the study of theater history will also be subject matters of this course. For each period or culture, topics will include exemplary plays, major playwrights, performance spaces, production apparatus, staging practices, and audiences. Questions concerning the theater's role in challenging and/or reinforcing hegemonic cultural values—including its mutually constitutive relations with environmental paradigms, policies, and practices—will receive emphasis. In order to facilitate cultural and historical comparisons among developments, the sequence of readings is determined by shared characteristics rather than by chronology. Instructional methods will include lectures, discussions, readings, presentations, writing assignments, examinations, screenings, and live performance.

REQUIREMENTS:

- **Attendance:** Course goals and methods necessitate conscientious class attendance. Excessive absences (more than 3) or tardiness will adversely affect your final grade.
- **Preparation:** The quality and alacrity of your participation in classroom discussions, of your preparation of various assigned readings and projects, and of your execution of occasional in-class writing assignments will determine 20% of your final grade.
- **Presentations:** Each student will present one 10-minute research report to the class during the semester (see below for dates and possible topics). This classroom presentation, together with your submission of a written outline and annotated bibliography, will figure as 20% of your final grade.
- **Paper:** During the last week of class, we shall present a public symposium on "Shifting Paradigms in Postmodern Performance Media." Each student will compose and present a 6-8 page paper that addresses some topic within this area. The topics will be arranged in advance, according to your interests, and will be grouped into "sessions," each of which will explore an area of the subject matter. Details of the conference will be worked out during the second half of the semester, and the presentations will determine 20% of your final grade.
- **Examinations:** Midway through the semester, students will have a midterm exam that will test all course coverage to that point. During the last week of the semester, students will take an examination covering all the material on the syllabus. The exams will test your command of material in both factual and analytical capacities. *Forewarning: students must score above 50% on identifications in order to have their essay(s) read.* The midterm will figure as 20%, and the final will figure as 20% of your final grade.
- **Late or Missing Work:** If approved in advance, I shall accept late work, but it will be penalized one letter grade. Otherwise, assignments are due for the class period as scheduled. *Students must submit all assignments to pass the course.*
- **Incompletes:** Grades of "Incomplete" will be assigned only by approval of a written petition from the student. This petition must explain the reasons for the request, and must be accompanied by documentation of either medical or personal emergency. All "Incompletes" must be converted according to the schedule in the College Catalog.
- **Events:** Students are required to attend each of the events included specifically on the attached syllabus. Additional recommended events, possibly including field trips to see performances in Washington, D.C., may be announced during the semester.
- **Readings:** Your syllabus contains an enumeration of the assigned readings and their due dates. The texts are available from the College Bookstore, on Library Reserve, and by xeroxed copies to be distributed in class.
- **Electronic Devices:** Unless you have specific ADA accommodations requiring the use of an electronic device, all cell phones, computers, etc. must be turned off and stowed during class.
- **Honor Code:** Students must abide by the "Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities" in the *Student Handbook*.

OFFICE HOURS/ELECTRONIC ACCESS:

T, 12:00 - 1:15 PM

W, 1:00 - 2:15 PM

and by appointment

MH 179C; ext. 4251

jrklein@smcm.edu (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

<http://faculty.smcm.edu/jrklein/>

Online syllabus (for links and current information): <http://faculty.smcm.edu/jrklein/300.S15.pdf>

TEXTS:

Beckett, *Happy Days*

Brecht, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*

Chekhov, *Chekhov: The Major Plays*

Churchill, *Cloud 9*

Ibsen, *The Wild Duck/Hedda Gabler*

Parks, *Venus*

Pinter, *Old Times*

Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre: From Stanislavsky to Peter Brook*

Shaffer, *Equus*

Smith, *Fires in the Mirror* (recommended)

Soyinka, *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*

Weiss, *Marat/Sade*

xeroxed materials as distributed in class

PRESENTATION TOPICS:

- 12 Feb The Apparatus of Realism: Its Codes and Media (Stanislavski, The Method, The Moscow Art Theatre, the box set, Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the Group Theatre)
- 26 Feb Turn-of-the-Century Dialectics: Antithetical "-isms" (Dadaism, Surrealism, Futurism, Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism, Expressionism)
- 28 Mar Performance Today: Agit-Prop (Bread and Puppet, Split Britches, Annie Sprinkle, Living Theater, San Francisco Mime Troupe, Guillermo Gomez-Peña/Coco Fusco, Tim Miller, Reverend Billy, etc.)
- 2 Apr Performance Today: Happenings, Performance Art (Wooster Group, Karen Finley, Squat Theater, Open Theater, Chris Burden, Burning Man, Allan Kaprow, Nam June Paik, Bob Flanagan, etc.)

EVENTS:

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| 12 Feb | R | IN-CLASS VIDEO: Wooster Group's <i>Brace Up</i> | Classroom |
| 25 Feb | W | "Exquisite Corpse" opens | BDT, 8PM |
| 5 Mar | R | IN-CLASS VIDEO: Arena Stage's <i>Happy End</i> | Classroom |
| 26 Mar | R | IN-CLASS VIDEO: <i>Marat/Sade</i> | Classroom |
| 31 Mar | T | ADVISING DAY VIDEO: <i>The Gospel at Colonus</i> | Classroom |
| 16 Apr | R | IN-CLASS VIDEO: <i>Fires in the Mirror</i> | Classroom |
| 22 Apr | R | <i>Slasher</i> opens | BDT, 8PM |
| 2 May | Sa | Conference: "Shifting Paradigms in Postmodern Performance Media" | Classroom |

THE SPEAKING AND WRITING CENTER:

The Speaking and Writing Center, located in the Library Annex, offers free consultations for student writers at all levels and in all disciplines. No matter what you're writing and no matter where you are in the writing process (generating ideas, drafting, revising or proofreading), the peer tutors in the Writing Center can assist you. These tutors are friendly students and also excellent writers with special training as writing consultants. They would not grade or correct your papers; instead, they'd coach you and help you become a better writer. I encourage you to use the Writing Center as much as possible. You can make a one-time or weekly appointment with the Center by visiting their website, www.smcm.edu/writingcenter, and clicking 'Schedule an Appointment.' At the same website, you can find helpful resources on many writing-related topics.

| <u>WEEK/UNIT</u> | <u>DISCUSSION TOPIC</u> | <u>ASSIGNMENTS DUE</u> | <u>SPECIAL EVENTS</u> |
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| 20 Jan T | Course Introduction: Today's Live Performance Media and (Sneaky) Transmissions of Cultural Values | | |
| 22 Jan R CONSTRUCTING "REALITY" | <i>Equus</i> : Thematic Matrices of the Modern Theater | <i>Equus</i> , British, 1974 | |
| 27 Jan T | <i>Equus</i> : Performance Matrices of the Modern Theater | presentation topic preferences due – TBA in class | |
| 29 Jan R | Ibsen: Realism and Its Discontents | <i>The Wild Duck</i> , Norwegian, 1881 | |
| 3 Feb T | Ibsen and the "Forest's Revenge" | | |
| 5 Feb R | Ibsen and Chekhov: Relations of Class, Realism, and Subtext | <i>The Three Sisters</i> , Russian, 1901; recommended reading: <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> | |
| 10 Feb T | <i>The Three Sisters</i> : Material Girls? | <i>Experimental Theatre</i> , pp. 1-61 | |
| 12 Feb R | A Century Later: Postmodernized Chekhov | | VIDEO: Wooster Group production of <i>Brace Up</i> , in-class screening of excerpts |
| 17 Feb T | The Apparatus of Realism: Its Codes and Media | STUDENT PRESENTATIONS | |
| 19 Feb R | <i>Old Times</i> : The Logical Extremes of Realism | <i>Old Times</i> , British, 1971; xerox of "Pinter's letter" | |
| 24 Feb T | Pinter: Index of Cultural Narcissism? | xeroxed materials on Photo-Realism | "Exquisite Corpse" opens W, 8:00 pm, Bruce Davis Theater |
| 26 Feb R FORKED BACKLASH | Turn-of-the-Century Dialectics: Antithetical "-isms" | xerox of <i>The Painting</i> , French, 1954; STUDENT PRESENTATIONS | |
| 3 Mar T | Brecht: Aesthetic Theorist, Socio-Economic Crusader, and Clown | <i>Experimental Theatre</i> , pp. 62-73; xeroxed materials; http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/8/brechtomania.html | |
| 5 Mar R | <i>Verfremdungseffekt</i> (and Singing) Exemplified in Performance | | VIDEO: Arena Stage production of <i>Happy End</i> , in-class screening |
| 10 Mar T | Brecht: Dogmatist, Poet, Nihilist | <i>The Good Woman of Setzuan</i> , German, 1943 | |
| 12 Mar R | Midterm Examination | | |
| 17 Mar T | No class meeting: Spring Break | | |

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| 19 Mar R | No class meeting: Spring Break | | |
| 24 Mar T "POMO" VALENCES | <i>Marat/Sade</i> : The Legacy of Brecht and Artaud | <i>Marat/Sade</i> , German, 1964 | |
| 26 Mar R | Media, Messages, Performance Refractions: <i>Marat/Sade</i> in Performance | <i>Experimental Theatre</i> , pp. 74-90, 145-173 | VIDEO: Royal Shakespeare Company production of <i>Marat/Sade</i> , in-class screening |
| 31 Mar T | Advising Day . . . BUT: Intercultural Experiment: Re-viewing Ancient Myths | recommended reading: <i>The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite</i> , Nigerian, 1973; Euripides's <i>The Bacchae</i> | VIDEO: Lee Breuer's <i>The Gospel at Colonus</i> , screening in MH 111 |
| 2 Apr R | Performance Today: Agit-Prop | <i>Experimental Theatre</i> , pp. 91-144 and 174-188 STUDENT PRESENTATIONS | |
| 7 Apr T | Performance Today: Happenings, Performance Art | conference paper abstracts due; STUDENT PRESENTATIONS | |
| 9 Apr R | Beckett: The Poetic Contraction, Beginning to End | <i>Happy Days</i> , Irish/French, 1961; xerox of Oliver essay | |
| 14 Apr T | Beckett in Performance: Theatrical Self-Reference and Conflations with Performance Art; Conference Arrangements | http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theatre_journal/v051/51.2pr_beckett.html | |
| 16 Apr R | Feminist Theatre, Embodiment, and Difference: Textual Morphologies and Performance Venues | | VIDEO: Anna Deavere Smith's <i>Fires in the Mirror</i> , United States, 1993, in-class screening |
| 21 Apr T | <i>Cloud 9</i> : "The Locus Classicus of Genderfuck" | <i>Cloud 9</i> , Great Britain, 1979; paper drafts due to session chairs | <i>Slasher</i> opens W, 8:00 pm, Bruce Davis Theater |
| 23 Apr R | <i>Cloud 9</i> : Doing and Undoing Gender/Conference Preparations | "Seeing Double" xerox; chairs discuss drafts with authors, etc. | |
| 28 Apr T | <i>Venus</i> : The Circus of Race, Gender, Class, and Diggidy-Diggidy History | <i>Venus</i> , United States, 1996 | |
| 30 Apr R | <i>Venus</i> and the Destiny of Live Performance; Conclusion and Review | | |
| 2 May Sa | Conference: Shifting Paradigms in Postmodern Performance Media | PAPERS DUE (Times TBA) | |
| 11 May M | FINAL EXAMINATION, 2:00-4:15 pm | | |