

MPhil in Criticism and Culture

DRAMATURGIES

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This seminar course will introduce students and scholars to the concept of dramaturgy as a mode of thinking about the poetics and politics of and in drama and performance.

Dramaturgy describes how the structure of a work produces time-space relations, which direct attention and determine the meaning of a text in performance. As such, the politics of any given work of theatre or performance is dependent not only on its content, but also on its dramaturgical form – and that the functioning of that form has, in turn, a symbiotic relationship with the social conditions of the making and reception of the work of performance.

Thematically the course will be concerned with questions of subjectivity, personhood, and representation – with particular reference to the relationship of these questions to capitalism. Overall through introducing you to a range of dramaturgical structures and their performance functions, we will collaborate over the six seminars to research how capitalism shapes and frames the cultural representation of individual subjectivity.

[Most play-texts will be available on [Drama Online](#) (log in using Raven)]

WEEK ONE: Introduction to Dramaturgy

This introductory seminar will explore the concept of dramaturgy – defining it through its European history, from Lessing onwards. We will then go on to explore tacit dramaturgical expectations in the making and reception of performance, which are time and context specific, but often – as often is the case with convention – go unremarked. This will provide a central framework and vocabulary from which to recognise the specificities of other kinds of dramaturgies. In particular, we will examine Stanislavskian structures of preparation in the rehearsal room, and what these techniques – so prevalent in the standard theatrical production of dramatic texts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – presume about personhood in representation.

Dramaturgies:

- The well-made play
- Cause-and-effect structures (the scientism of ‘objective’ and ‘event’)

PRIMARY (essential)

Ibsen, *A Doll's House* (1879)

Chekhov, *Three Sisters* (1900)

Peter Szondi ‘The Drama’ *Theory of the Modern Drama* (Polity Press, 1987 (first published in German 1965)), pp. 7-11

Nick Ridout, ‘introduction’; *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems* (CUP: 2006) (this brings into play a variety of issues relating to the contested position of theatre in capitalist modernity that we will return to throughout the seminar series)

FURTHER READING

Katie Mitchell, *The director's craft: A handbook for the theatre* (London: Routledge, 2008) (for a clear introduction to uses of Stanislavski in the rehearsal room, aimed at directors rather than critics but nevertheless useful)

Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006, [first published in German in 1999]), especially ‘Drama’ pp. 29-45

WEEK TWO: Renaissance Dramaturgies & the audience

Consider the public. Treat it with tact and courtesy. It will accept much from you if you are clever enough to win it to your side. Never fear it or despise it. Coax it, charm it, interest it, stimulate it, shock it now and then if you must, make it laugh, make it cry and make it think, but above all, in spite of indiscriminate and largely ignorant critical acclaim, in spite of awards and prizes and other dubious accolades, never, never, bore the living hell out of it. Noel Coward, *Encore* vol. 2 (London: 1962) p. 180.

This seminar will explore the ways in which dramatic works are structured to engage and hold an audience's attention. That is, we will be examining how they are created for an audience, and are dependent on that audience for their dramaturgy to function. The focus will be predominantly on Renaissance drama, particularly Shakespeare – developing a revisionist recognition of how a pre-Freudian, pre-Stanislawskian dramaturgy might work, but also exploring how the emergence of capitalism influences the representation of the person in Shakespeare's plays. Please come prepared to bring any/all previous knowledge of Shakespeare's plays to bear on the questions under examination, as well as making sure to (re)read Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Middleton's *Changeling*.

We will also trace the 'entertainment' structure into the twentieth-century to explore mid-twentieth-century dramaturgies of entertainment, to prepare the ground for week three's concentration on modernism and the modern drama.

Dramaturgies:

- Sub-plots and 'main' plots in early modern drama
- Dramaturgy and character
- Dramaturgy and genre

PRIMARY (essential)

Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (1606)

Middleton and Rowley, *The Changeling* (1622)

Noel Coward, *Hayfever* (1925)

Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed' in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity in association with Basil Blackwell, 1993), pp. 29-73.

Dan Rebellato *Theatre & Globalisation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009) (for a consideration of what happens to the dramaturgy of entertainment under conditions of late, neoliberal, global capitalism)

FURTHER READING

Bridget Escolme, *Talking to the Audience* (Taylor & Francis, 2004)

Tiffany Stern, *Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page* (Routledge, 2004)

Noel Coward, 'Introduction' in *Plays Two*, ed. Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson (London: Methuen, 1979)

Noel Coward, 'Introduction' *Plays One* (London: Methuen, 1979)

WEEK THREE: The Modern 'Art' Theatre

This week's seminar will concentrate on different kinds of twentieth century backlash against dramaturgies of entertainment, through exploring modernist anti-theatricality, and how the theatre responded by inviting audiences to become absorbed in apparently autonomous performances (ie performances apparently independent of their audiences). We will be considering how the advent of technological modernity influenced perceptions of representation and the person.

Dramaturgies:

- The fourth wall
- The poetics (and politics) of autonomy in art
- Antitheatricality

PRIMARY (essential)

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (1956); *Endgame* (1957)

Gertrude Stein, 'Plays' (1935), in *Writings and Lectures 1911-1945*, ed. Patricia Meyerowitz, with an introduction by Elizabeth Sprigge (London: Peter Owen Ltd, 1967), pp. 50-81

Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 148-172

Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903) in *Images of Man: the Classic Tradition in Sociological Thinking*, selected and edited by C. Wright Mills (New York: George Braziller, Inc., c1960), pp. 437-48

FURTHER READING

Roland Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein' in *Image, Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 69-78

August Strindberg, 'Preface' to *Miss Julie* (1888), in *Miss Julie and other plays*, trans. by Michael Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) pp. 56-68

Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002)

Rebellato, Dan, *1956 and All That: The Making of Modern British Drama* (London: Routledge, 1999)

Edward Gordon Craig, 'The Actor and the Übermarionette' in *On the Art of the Theatre*, edited and introduced by Franc Chamberlain (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 27-48

Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, 'Modernism and theatrical performance' http://www.js-modcult.bham.ac.uk/articles/issue1_barr2.pdf (overview of the concurrent antitheatricality of modernism and the essential place of theatrical experiment in the history of modernism)

Claire Warden, *Modernist and Avant-Garde Performance: An Introduction* (Edinburgh University Press; 2015)

WEEK FOUR: Dramaturgy and Politics

What constitutes a political play? Opening up beyond Bourdieu's sociological distinction between 'art' and 'entertainment' as having inverse criteria for value, in this seminar we will be exploring a rich theatrical phenomenon particularly strong in the theatre of the twentieth century – theatre that is 'for' an audience but conceived of as such for political and social reasons. From Brecht's epic theatre, via social experiments in bringing theatre to a 'non-theatre' audience, to contemporary playwrights Caryl Churchill and debbie tucker green, we will be considering the relationship between the aesthetic, social and political in the dramaturgy of plays, preparing the ground for wider considerations of the political in performance in weeks five and six.

Dramaturgies:

- Documentary
- Episodic structure (Brecht's epic / contemporary drama)
- Formal hybridity
- Resistance to direct representation

PRIMARY (essential)

Caryl Churchill, *Serious Money* (1987); *Far Away* (2000); *Love and Information* (2012)

debbie tucker green, *Generations* (2005); *Trade* (2004); *Random* (2008)

Arthur Miler, *All My Sons* (1947)

Alice Childress, *Trouble In Mind* (1955)

Bertolt Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre' (notes to the Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny, 1930) in *Brecht on Theatre*, trans and ed. John Willett, (Methuen, 1964)

Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*. London: Verso, 2009.

By way of instructive dramaturgical contrast to the politics of *Serious Money*, you might find it useful to read Lucy Prebble's *Enron* (2009) – which uses similar theatrical techniques but to very different political ends.

FURTHER READING

John McGrath, *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1996 (first published 1981)

Joe Kelleher, *Theatre & Politics* (Palgrave, 2009)

Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992)

Colin Chambers, *The story of Unity Theatre* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989)

WEEK FIVE: Participation and (post)capitalism

This week brings us to the heart of my own practice-led research, as we will explore the relationship between politics, participation, and production. We will attempt to situate these practices in relation to a post-Brechtian sensibility – and in relation to neoliberal appropriations. Can theatre address any longer what it means to be alive now? What might a postcapitalist theatre look like, and what might it mean for representation?

Dramaturgies:

- ‘Play’ dramaturgy (ie the dramaturgies of interactive and participatory theatre)
- The dramaturgy of ‘immersion’
- Market-orientated dramaturgies
- Postdramatic theatre

PRIMARY (essential)

Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Les Presses du reel: 1998 (English version: 2002))

Claire Bishop, ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’, *October* 110 (Autumn 2004), 51-79.

Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006, [first published in German in 1999])

FURTHER READING

Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

Adam Alston (2013) ‘Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value: Risk, agency and responsibility in immersive theatre’, *Performance Research*, 18:2, 128-38

Forced Entertainment - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJGm8hDhCdo> , *Bloody Mess* (2004); *Quizoola* (c2003- present - <https://www.forcedentertainment.com/project/quizoola/> <https://vimeo.com/64273504>); *All Tomorrow's Parties* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fig0PWCwSpM>) (2011) Complete Works <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JU4aXQI4ViI>

METIS, *3rd Ring Out* (2009-2011) www.3rdringout.com (including video extracts)

Zoe Svendsen, ‘The Dramaturgy of Spontaneity: Improvising the Social in Performance’ in *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*, ed. Georgina Born, Eric Lewis and William Straw (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2017)

METIS, *World Factory* (2015-2017)

Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (London: Zero Books, 2009)

Duška Radosavljević, *Theatre-Making: Interplay between Text and Performance in the 21st Century* (2013)

WEEK SIX: Dramaturgy, performance and the representation of women

In the creation of a structure for the containment and expression of meaning, there are always exclusions. To what extent does or can the practice of theatre hold up such exclusions to view – and what inequities does it repeat and affirm? To explore some of these questions we will focus particularly on the relationship between the different kinds of dramaturgy we have explored across the seminar series, and the representation of women in theatre and performance. This will encompass both how fictional women have been represented through dramaturgical form, and how female artists have sought to develop alternative dramaturgies to produce a space of (self)expression.

Dramaturgies:

- Performance Art
- Live Art
- Body Art
- Misogyny
- Repetition

PRIMARY (essential)

August Strindberg, *Miss Julie* (1888)

David Graeber, 'Dead Zones of the Imagination', *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (London, 2015), pp. 45-104

Further Explorations – please choose from the below and then follow your own investigations

Artists include Carolee Schneemann; Marina Abramovic; Judy Chicago; Bobby Baker; Lois Weaver and Split Britches; Lena Simic.

Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris eds, *Feminist Futures? Theatre, Performance, Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006)

Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993)

Stefka Mihaylova, 'Whose Performance Is It Anyway? Performed Criticism as Feminist Strategy', *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol 25(3), 2009, 255-73 (available online through the UL)

Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things to Me* (London, 2014); *The Mother of All Questions* (London, 2017)

Oriana Fox, 'Once More with Feeling: an abbreviated history of feminist performance art' *Feminist Review*, No. 96, urban spaces (2010), 107-21

S. Shepherd, 'Body art and feminism' in *The Cambridge Introduction to Performance Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 117-121

RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (2001)