MPhil in Criticism and Culture: DRAMATURGIES  
Dr. Zoë Svendsen

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 explore how capitalism shapes and frames the cultural representation of individual subjectivity.

[Most play-texts will be available on Drama Online (log in using Raven), as well as in the Faculty or University Libraries. If you have no joy with the University Library catalogue, it might mean that the play is as yet uncatalogued, in which case, please ask at the University Library reading room desk, and they should be able to find it and catalogue it for you]
WEEK ONE: Introduction to Dramaturgy

This introductory seminar will explore the concept of dramaturgy - defining it through its European history. We 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 exploration and excavation of the construction of traditional dramaturgy 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:
- ‘classical’ dramaturgy and the well-made play
- Cause-and-effect structures (the nineteenth-century scientism of ‘objective’ and ‘event’)

PRIMARY (essential)

Ibsen, A Doll’s House (1879)

Chekhov, The Seagull (1895/96)

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)

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 audiences’ 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-Stanislavskian 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 Middleton’s The Changeling and Shakespeare’s Hamlet.

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)

Middleton and Rowley, The Changeling (1622)

Shakespeare, Hamlet (c1599-1601)

Noel Coward, Hayfever (1925)

FURTHER READING

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)

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

Tiffany Stern, Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page (Routledge, 2004)
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 (i.e., 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)

August Strindberg, Miss Julie (1888)

Samuel Beckett, Endgame (1957), Happy Days (1961)


FURTHER READING


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)


Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, ‘Modernism and theatrical performance’ http://www.js-modcult.bham.ac.uk/articles/issue1_barr2.pdf

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 Pierre 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 onwards, we will be considering different ways in which the relationship between the aesthetic, social and political is shaped by 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)

Arthur Miller, All My Sons (1947)

Alice Childress, Trouble In Mind (1955)

Caryl Churchill, Serious Money (1987)

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)


FURTHER READING


Joe Kelleher, Theatre & Politics (Palgrave, 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.
WEEK FIVE: 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 particularly the representation of women in theatre and performance. As part of this consideration of representation, we will consider questions of race, racism, and silencing. We will explore 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 – and the body
• Resistant dramaturgies: repetition, argument, perspective

PRIMARY (essential)


debbie tucker green, Dirty Butterfly (2003), Trade (2005), an ear for an eye (2018)

>‘The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action’ (pp. 1-6)
>‘The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House’ (pp. 89-93)
>‘The Uses of Anger: Responding to Racism’ (pp. 107-18)

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

Contemporary Theatre Review Special Issue October 2018 on ‘feminisms now’ – offering a good selection of considerations regarding feminism, intersecting with questions of racism.

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

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


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


WEEK SIX: Dramaturgy and the Climate Crisis

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 post-capitalist 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)


FURTHER READING

Donna Haraway, ‘sympoeisis’ and ‘making kin’ in Staying With The Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene (Duke University Press, 2016)


Complete Works https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JU4aXQj4ViI

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

METIS, *WE KNOW NOT WHAT WE MAY BE* (2016-onwards)
https://metisarts.co.uk/projects/we-know-not-what-we-may-be