Theatre Arts 121
History of the Theatre II – 1600 to 1980
Spring, 2010

MWF 9:15-10:20
Porter Theatre
Dr. John Blondell; extension 6778
T/R 10:30-12; Monday 3-4; and by appointment

Theoretical Introduction

The master subject of theatre is change. Whether understood in terms of a stage figure’s personal destiny (a young college student is called to avenge his father’s death), the stage picture (an eaves-dropping counselor is stabbed, and falls dramatically through a curtain), or the words in a speech (“To” flows into “be” in a famous soliloquy), change is constant in the theatre. It is the art form’s subject and means – subject because theatre’s meanings are always derived from it, and means because the activities of the theatre (acting, staging, speaking, moving, lighting, etc.) always display it. Change is ever-present, unchanging, unequivocal – both in life and in the theatre. If theatre is the art closest to life itself, as I would argue, then it is theatre’s partnership with change that makes it so. Change is also central to theatre history. In the western world, the ideas, practices, and institutions of theatre are in constant, dynamic flux: this is why much theatre looks different today than it did 200 years ago, or 20 years ago, for that matter. Yet change is seen and understood in relation to what doesn’t change – established conventions that offer continuity between periods and cultures. This is why many theatrical conventions haven’t changed from the time of ancient Greeks. The purpose of theatre history is to create narratives that describe the shifting practices of the art form, in relation to stable conventions that offer continuity between periods.

Methodological Introduction

This course explores how, why, and in what ways western theatre has changed over the past 400 years, and accounts for the traditions that afford theatre its essential continuity. It develops the socio-cultural, aesthetic, and intellectual history of the theatre in the western world from 1600-1980, explores theatre as an artifact of broad-based cultural change, and explores forces within the form itself that induced transformation. The course is concerned with two important narratives of the western theatre – the rise of the “professional theatre” as it developed in Europe and America in the early 17th century, and the “modern theatre” that emerged in those countries in the latter half of the 19th. In Hamlet, the title character says that the purpose of playing is, as it were, to “hold a mirror up to nature.” Studying and writing about history offers many similar opportunities –
historians “see” into the past, interpret the residue of previous periods of human endeavor, and create ways to understand human social, cultural, and aesthetic life.

Theatre’s special allure is its liveness. The “complete” theatrical experience is perceived only through the super-charged now of performance. When that performance slips into memory, into “the presence of things past,” as St. Augustine would say, it presents special challenges to the historian. The experience is no longer “there” for analysis, evaluation, and interpretation: only vestiges remain, palimpsests of what were there before, artifacts of a previously lived experience. The study of theatre history is the study of these artifacts, the relics left behind following the dismembering ravages of Time. These artifacts could include many things – writings, drawings, models, manifestoes, letters, essays, plays, sketches, engravings, paintings, budgets, and lists that provide a picture (incomplete as it is) of the art form’s institutional and creative development. Our job will be to analyze the artifacts, interpret their meaning, and create narratives that explain theatrical output from 1600-1980.

The Nitty Gritty
Goals and Purposes

By the end of the course, you will accomplish these master objectives:

- Develop the literacy necessary for discussing, writing, speaking, and researching Western Theatre from 1600-1980.

- Develop knowledge of the theory and practice of Western Theatre from 1600-1980.

- Develop skills necessary for historical research, analysis, and writing.

Toward that end, you will display the following in your thinking, speaking, and writing: proper historical, theoretical, and aesthetic terminology integral to describing theatre and drama; appropriate historical processes for analyzing and interpreting theatre and drama; educated standards of judgment related to cultural contexts and their artistic products; and openness to an understanding of the multi-facetted nature of aesthetic enjoyment, cultural purpose, and historical understanding.

Objects of Study

Our objects of study include primary sources (letters, treatises, essays, and manifestoes) that describe the art of acting, the development of directing, and new directions in theatre purpose, process, or philosophy; secondary sources that trace the development of the visual component of the theatre, especially as it relates to architecture and design; and plays that reflect the concerns of the places and periods in question.
Texts

*Actors on Acting*, Edited by Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy

*Theatre and Playhouse*, by Richard and Helen Leacroft

*The Theory of the Modern Stage*, Edited by Eric Bentley

Plays

*Tartuffe*, by Moliere

*The School For Scandal*, by Richard Brinsley Sheridan

*Hedda Gabler*, by Henrik Ibsen

*The Three Sisters*, by Anton Chekhov

*The Emperor Jones*, by Eugene O’Neill

*Mother Courage and Her Children*, by Bertolt Brecht

*Waiting For Godot*, by Samuel Beckett

Topics of Study and Assignments

M Jan 7
Introduction to Course

W Jan 9
The Theatre of Louis XIV
Leacroft, pp. 49-52; and Cole and Chinoy, pp. 153-159

F Jan 11
The Theatre of Louis XIV, continued

M Jan 14
*Tartuffe*, by Moliere

W Jan 16
Opera, Perspective Scenery, and Courtly Spectacle: The Theatre in Italy
Leacroft, pp. 42-48; 67-70

F Jan 18
The Restoration Stage
Leacroft, pp. 71-75; and Cole and Chinoy, pp. 97-102

M Jan 21
No Class – Martin Luther King Holiday

T Jan 22
The Restoration Stage, continued

W Jan 23
18th Century Theatre in Paris
Cole and Chinoy, pp. 161-170; 178-187

F Jan 25
A Fashionable Theatre: The 18th Century London Stage
Leacroft, pp. 86-94; and Cole and Chinoy, pp. 122-138

M Jan 28
The 18th Century London Stage, continued

W Jan 30
*The School For Scandal*, by Richard Brinsley Sheridan

F Feb 1
The Emerging German Stage
Read Cole and Chinoy, pp. 261-282
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading/Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>M Feb 4</td>
<td>First Essay Due – The Physical Theatre</td>
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<td>W Feb 6</td>
<td>The 18th Century American Stage</td>
<td>Leacroft, pp. 103-113</td>
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<td>F Feb 8</td>
<td>Melodrama and Spectacle – The Romantic Theatre in Europe and America</td>
<td>Cole and Chinoy, pp. 202-209; 321-341; 282-284</td>
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<td>F Feb 15</td>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>M Feb 18</td>
<td>No Class – President’s Day Holiday</td>
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<td>F Feb 22</td>
<td>Hedda Gabler, by Henrik Ibsen</td>
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<td>M Feb 25</td>
<td>Revolution in Russia – Stanislavsky on Acting and Directing</td>
<td>Cole and Chinoy, pp. 485-495; Margarshack, “Stanislavsky,” in Bentley, pp. 219-278</td>
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<td>W Feb 27</td>
<td>Stanislavsky, continued</td>
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<td>F Mar 1</td>
<td>First Revision Due</td>
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<td>M Mar 3</td>
<td>Expressionism</td>
<td>Read Cole and Chinoy, pp. 299-300</td>
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<td>W Mar 5</td>
<td>The Provincetown Players</td>
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<td>F Mar 7</td>
<td>The Three Sisters, by Anton Chekhov</td>
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<td>Simonson, “The Ideas of Adolphe Appia,” in Bentley, pp. 27-50</td>
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<td>W Mar 12</td>
<td>The Poetic Theatre, continued</td>
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<td>F Mar 14</td>
<td>Second Essay Due</td>
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<td>M Mar 17</td>
<td>No class, Spring Recess</td>
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<td>W Mar 19</td>
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<td>M Mar 24</td>
<td>No class, Spring Recess</td>
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W Mar 26  The Fever Dreams of Antonin Artaud
Artaud, “The Theatre of Cruelty, First and Second Manifestos,”
in Bentley, pp. 55-75
F Mar 28  Trends in Central Europe, 1920-1940
M Mar 31  The Group Theatre in New York
W April 2  Strasberg, Stanislavsky, and the American Method
Chinoy, pp. 601-606; 613-634
F April 4  Bertolt Brecht and the Epic Theatre
Brecht, “A Street Scene,” in Bentley, pp. 85-96
Brecht, “On Experimental Theatre,” in Bentley, pp. 97-104

M April 7  Mother Courage and Her Children, by Bertolt Brecht
W April 9  Development of the American Musical
F April 11  The American Musical, continued

M April 14  The Theatre of the Absurd
W April 16  Waiting for Godot, by Samuel Beckett
Third Revision Due
F April 18  Jerzy Grotowski and the Poor Theatre
Cole and Chinoy, pp. 529-535

M April 21  The Immediate Theatre of Peter Brook, “The Deadly Theatre”
Handout
W April 23  Wrap Up and Final Discussion
F April 25  No Class – Reading Day

Method of Assessment:  Midterm Exam – 20%
Final Exam – 30%
Two 8-10 page essays – 40%
Class Participation – 10%

Attendance Policy:  Students are allowed a total of three (3) unexcused absences for the
semester.  4 unexcused absences will result in failure of the “Class Participation” portion
of your grade.  5 unexcused absences will result in failure in the course.

Notes on Assignments

Note:  Westmont has identified six important standards as foundational for
our work as a college.  These standards include Christian Orientation, Critical-
Interdisciplinary Thinking, Diversity, Active Societal and Intellectual Engagement,
Written and Oral Communication, and Research and Technology.  This course has
been approved as a writing intensive course, and speaks to the college’s commitment
to foster effective communication in a wide variety of contexts. In this particular course, students will develop their writing through three major course assignments relative to the practical arts of the stage, including theatre architecture, acting, and directing. These assignments will be evaluated on a range of criteria, including rhetorical effectiveness, creativity, historical and cultural awareness, and critical assessment.

This course satisfies the “Thinking Historically” component of Westmont’s General Education Program. Courses satisfying this requirement develop students’ awareness of appreciation for the particularities of time and place, a sense of the complex process of change and continuity over time, the ability to work critically with a range of primary and secondary historical texts, and appreciation for the art of constructing historical narrative. By studying specific historical periods, the history of Christianity, the history of academic disciplines, or by taking interdisciplinary courses, students should: become critical readers of a range of historical sources; appreciate the important of historical context in shaping our understanding of the world in which we live; be able to engage in thoughtful interpretive and historiographic discussion; have practice in constructing historical narrative; understand the complexity of historical change.

You are required to write two 8-10 page essays for this course.

Essay #1

Using primary and secondary sources, you will create a narrative for a period or figure’s approach to acting. Topics are many, and could include the “mechanistic” process of 18th century English actor David Garrick, the “psycho-technique” of Constantin Stanislavky, or the “Epic” Theatre of Bertolt Brecht. The purpose of the essay is to analyze primary sources for the central ideas, demonstrable tendencies, and visual remnants of your subject, and – through the help of secondary sources – create a narrative interpretation that develops the central artistic contributions of the actor or period in question.

Essay #2

Using primary and secondary sources, you will create a stage history of a significant performance of the 20th century. Primary sources will include reviews, letters, photographs, journals, autobiographies, firsthand accounts, letters, and videotape that describe, interpret, and analyze the performance in question. Secondary sources will include journal articles or book chapters about the performance, which help provide context, interpretation, or evaluation for the performance. Essay topics could include the following performances: Constantin Stanislavsky's *The Seagull* at the Moscow Art Theatre; Peter Brook’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at the Royal Shakespeare Company; Peter Stein’s *The Oresteia* at the Berlin Shaubuhne; Arthur Hopkins *The Hairy Ape* at the Provincetown Playhouse; Rodger’s and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* on Broadway; or others of your own choosing. The purpose of the essay is to collect and interpret
important primary source material that describes firsthand knowledge or impact of the production, secondary material that contextualizes the performance in aesthetic, cultural, or formal terms; and tell the story of how, why, and it what ways this performance is significant for an understanding of 20th century historical practice.

Essays are due on the dates indicated. Students will receive a letter grade and specific feedback on work submitted, both in written and oral form. Students will use the feedback to prepare revisions of the essays, which are due on the dates indicated. At that time, more written feedback will be offered, and students have, as an option, the opportunity to continue revising their work. In other words, all students will revise each written assignment at least one time during the course of the semester, and may revise essays as many times as they wish, at least until the hour glass of the semester runs its course.