Introduction to American and German Theater

Seminar Leader: Julia Dittrich
Times: Friday 10:45 – 12:15; 13:30 – 15:00
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Course Description
This is a survey course to introduce students to the very different theater traditions of the United States and Germany. We will first take a brief look at the theater history and the role of the theater in each country to understand how differences in acting and directing approaches have developed. The course will then focus on a comparison of major acting and directing techniques of both countries. Through a combination of readings, discussions, and practical scenic work students will gain insights into the main ideas behind American and German theater. Each topic will first be addressed in a seminar setting with readings and a seminar discussion. Then students will experiment with various acting and directing methods in the rehearsal rooms themselves. Throughout the semester we will look at scenes from Tennesse Williams’ A Streetcar Named Desire and rehearse this play under the different lenses of German and American theater. Students will be graded on participation in course discussions, participation in scenework (rehearsal preparation, participation and scene presentations), and three critical essays.

Course Requirements:

- active participation in class discussions
- completion of all reading assignments
- attendance (absences can only be excused if a medical note is submitted to the registrar’s office)
- completion of three written essays
- participation in the three scenework requirements as an actor or director.

Scenework requirements:

- preparation: basic knowledge and familiarity with the play, plot, and characters
- memorization of lines for the scene presentation
- one additional rehearsal per scene to be completed outside of class
Written requirements:
Essay 1 (1500 words) due 25.10
Essay 2 (1500 words) due 22.11
Essay 3 (2000 words) due 20.12

*Please note: Essays that are submitted 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade. Late essays must be turned in within four weeks of deadline and cannot receive higher than a C.

Essays should contain the following:

- Rehearsal process: how the scene was chosen, a brief analysis of the character worked on and the structure of the scene, descriptions from rehearsal, including what acting methods were implemented and how they were implemented, challenges and observations from rehearsals

- Evaluation of the scene presentation and acting/directing methods used.

Grade Breakdown:
Scenework - 30%
Written Assignments - 40%
Class Discussions - 30%

Topics and Required Reading

6.9 What is theater? What is an actor? What is a director?
Introduction to the development and differences in German and American theater.

13.9 Stanislavsky: An Introduction and Discussion of His Role in American Theater

20.9 Method Acting.
Required Reading: Bruder, Melissa. A Practical Handbook for the Actor. 11-65

27.9 The Director’s Role/ Script Analysis: (Weston, Reich)
Hauser and Reich. Notes on Directing. 9-14.

4.10 Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire
Required Reading: Williams, Tennessee. A Streetcar Named Desire
Scene selection for Scene Study 1.
11.10   NO CLASS

18.10   Scene Study 1 Rehearsals/ Presentations

25.10   Weimar Classicism: Lessing, Goethe, Reinhardt
         Director’s Role (seeds of Regietheater)
         Required Reading: ed. Toby Cole. *Actors on Acting.* 254-61
         Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Rules for the Actor.* 267-69
         Reinhardt, Max. *The Enchanted Sense of Play.* 295-99
         Essay 1 due 23:59

1.11    Brecht and the Epic Theater
         Required Reading: ed. Toby Cole. *Actors on Acting.* 307-314
         Benjamin, Walter. *What is Epic Theater?* 147-154
         Brecht, Bertolt. *A Short Organum for the Theatre.*
         Scene 2 Selection.

8.11    Epic Theater/ Scene 2 Rehearsals on *A Streetcar Named Desire*

15.11   Scene Study 2 Rehearsals/ Presentations
         ** Berlin Theater Visit

22.11   Regietheater in Germany today: Examples, Experiment, Debate
         Essay 2 due.

29.11   Post-dramatic Theater. An Introduction (examples from US and Germany)
         Scene 3 Selection.

6.12    Scene Study 3 Rehearsals.


20.12   Essay 3 due.