TH310 Bertolt Brecht: The Study and Staging of Epic Theater

Module: Media, Practices, Techniques
Seminar Leader: Julia Hart
Course Times: Wednesday, 1:30-4:45pm
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Course Description
Nowhere else can Bertolt Brecht's presence be felt more than in the streets of Berlin. But what really is the Epic Theater he is so famous for and what influence does it have on stage in Berlin's current theater scene? This course will not study the plays of Brecht as literature, but students will be in dialogue with Brecht as one of the most revolutionary theatermakers of the 20th Century. This seminar will introduce students to Brecht's theoretical texts on the epic theater such as A Short Organum for the Theater and The Street Scene. Students will not only analyze these provocative theater techniques, but will learn to use Brecht's specific acting and directing exercises and devices in rehearsal. Throughout the semester, students will act and direct scenes from two of Brecht's classic epic works: Mother Courage and Her Children and The Good Person of Szechuan, to investigate how Brecht and his ensemble worked. This course includes visits to several theater productions in Berlin to question Brecht's footprint on German theater today.

Requirements

- active participation in class discussions and rehearsals
- completion of all reading assignments
- attendance (One absence is allowed. Every additional absence will result in the demotion of one-half letter grade at the end of the term.)
- completion of three short written essays
- participation in the three scenework requirements as an actor or director.

Scenework requirements:

- preparation: able to critically reflect on the play, plot, and characters
- full memorization of lines for rehearsal
- one additional 2-3 hour rehearsal per scene to be completed outside of class

Written requirements:

Essay 1 (2000 words) due 1.4.2015
Essay 2 (2000 words) due 29.04.2015
*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 scene (the situation, the Brechtian gestus, the characters, the central conflict), descriptions from rehearsal, including what rehearsal (as actors or directors) methods of epic theater were implemented and how they were implemented, challenges and observations from rehearsals

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

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

**Schedule**

28.1 What is epic theater?
Introduction to Bertolt Brecht and the epic theater.

4.2 Epic Theater and the Alienation Technique
**Required Reading:**
- *Fifty Key Theatre Directors*: 52-56
- *Actors on Acting*: 307-311
- *Brecht Sourcebook*: 23-26
- *A Short Organum for the Theater in Brecht on Theatre*: 179-205
- *Guide to the Plays of Bertolt Brecht*: 57-64

11.2 Epic Theater and Acting
**Required Reading:**
- *The Street Scene in Brecht on Theatre*: 121-29,
- *Brecht on Theatre*: 136-140, 236-39
- *Actors on Acting*: 312-16
- *Cambridge Companion*: 219-23, 278-81 (211-19 is optional)
- *Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations*. What is Epic Theater? 147-54
optional: *Brecht Sourcebook*: 43-48 (Gestus and the influence of American actors)

18.2 Epic Theater Direction, Dramaturg, Rehearsal Process and Stage Design
**Visit to Bertolt Brecht Archive, meet at Sbahn Nordbahnhof station at 2pm**
**Required Reading:**
- *Cambridge Companion to Brecht*: 180,193-99 (Invention of the Dramaturg), 259-78,
- *Brecht on Theatre*: 230-33, 239-46
- *Guide to the Plays of Bertolt Brecht*: 64-75
25.2  Mother Courage and Her Children  
Required Reading: Mother Courage and Her Children  
A Guide to the Plays of Bertolt Brecht: 207-215  
Cambridge Companion: 132-42  
Scene selection for Mother Courage and Her Children.

4.3  Rehearsals for Mother Courage and Her Children  
Required Reading:  
Bertolt Brecht: 113-127  
Assignment: one rehearsal outside of class

11.3  Rehearsals for Mother Courage and Her Children  
Assignment: one rehearsal outside of class

18.3  Spring Break

25.3  Presentations and Evaluation for Mother Courage

1.4  The Good Person from Szechwan  
Required Reading:  
The Good Person from Szechwan  
Guide to the Plays of Bertolt Brecht: 199-206  
Essay 1 due.  
Scene 2 selection.

8.4  Good Person Rehearsals  
Required Reading:  
Cambridge Companion: 118-131  
Assignment: one rehearsal outside of class

15.4  Good Person Rehearsals  
Assignment: one rehearsal outside of class

22.4  Presentations and Evaluation for The Good Person of Szechwan

29.4  Post-Epic Theater: Brecht’s Influence on contemporary theater: Peter Stein, Pina Bausch, Armin Petras, Rimini Protokoll, Andres Veiel, Rene Pollesch, Heiner Goebbels  
Required Assignment: a prepare and present a brief introduction of one of the above director’s work as post-epic theater  
Essay 2 due.

6.5  Last Day of Class. Rehearsals and evaluation for public scene presentation.

13.5  Completion Week