

REVOLUTIONS IN THEATER

THE COURSE MEETS Monday – Wednesday, 10 – 11:50 AM IN Waite Phillips Hall of Education (WPH) B30
WEBSITE: <http://blackboard.usc.edu> FINAL EXAM DUE: Monday, December 17, 10 AM
INSTRUCTOR: Prof. **BORIS WOLFSON**, Depts. of Comparative Literature and Slavic Languages & Literatures
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OFFICE HOURS: Mondays and Wednesdays by appointment

• COURSE DESCRIPTION

Each bold innovation in twentieth-century theater sought to redefine in its own way the very idea of theatricality, and so to reshape the relationship between text and performance, experience and interpretation, social reality and cultural tradition. The conviction that a director can, as Peter Brook put it, “take any empty space and call it a bare stage” led the great reformers whose theoretical writings and theatrical practices are examined in this course to conflicting visions of theater’s role in the esthetic, cultural and social revolutions of their times. We focus on the experimental esthetics of Konstantin Stanislavsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Tadeusz Kantor, Heiner Müller, and Robert Wilson – and each director’s radical reinventions of theater: as naturalistic, realistic, symbolist, constructivist, expressionist, epic, cruel, poor, deathlike, and holy.

• READINGS

Constantin Stanislavski. *An Actor Prepares*. Routledge, 2003.
Bertolt Brecht. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Anchor Press, 1956.
Antonin Artaud. *The Theatre and Its Double*. Grove Press, 1966.
Jean Genet. *The Balcony*. Grove Press, 1994.
Peter Brook. *The Empty Space*. Touchstone, 1995.
William Shakespeare. *Macbeth*. Ed. Steven Orgel (The Pelican Shakespeare). Penguin Classics, 2000.
Course Pack: Anton Chekhov, *Cherry Orchard*; Edward Gordon Craig, “The Actor and the Über-Marionette;”
Vsevolod Meyerhold, *Meyerhold on Theatre* [selections]; Nikolay Gogol, *The Government Inspector*;
Walter Benjamin, “What Is Epic Theater?”; Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* [selections];
Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* [selections], *The Grotowski Sourcebook* [selections];
Ludwik Flaszen, “Wyspianski’s Akropolis;” Tadeusz Kantor, *A Journey Through Other Spaces* [selections];
Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, *The Madman and the Nun*, “Pure Form in the Theater;”
Heiner Müller, *Hamletmachine*, *Quartet*, “19 Answers by Heiner Müller,” *A Heiner Müller Reader* [selections];
Philip Glass, “Notes on *Einstein on the Beach*,” Robert Wilson, *A Letter for Queen Victoria*, “Current Projects.”

All **books** are available at the Pertusati University Bookstore on the University Park Campus. You may purchase these texts from other vendors, including online sources, but if you do so, please make sure that you purchase the exact editions listed above, and that you arrange to receive the texts well in advance of the dates on which they are scheduled to be read and discussed in class.

The **course pack** is available only from University Readers and must be ordered online. To get started, point your browser to www.universityreaders.com/students and click on “Create New Account;” you will be prompted to enter all other necessary information. Once you’ve placed the order, the full course pack will be shipped to you via USPS Priority Mail, and the first 20% of its contents (including the entirety of *Cherry Orchard*) will be available to you immediately, to be downloaded as a PDF file.

• COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

The essential course requirements are: attentive reading of assigned texts and active participation in class and online discussion; two written assignments; three in-class presentations; a final exercise (exam). The final course grade will be determined according to the following guidelines:

<i>In-class Participation</i>	15%	<i>First Written Assignment</i>	15%
<i>Online Discussion</i>	15%	<i>Second Written Assignment</i>	25%
<i>Presentations</i>	15%	<i>Final Exam (Exercise)</i>	15%

This course uses the online grade book available on our Blackboard site. You will be able to look up your score for every assignment; the grade book software will also calculate a running total for you. If you have questions regarding the grade level at which you are performing, please contact the instructor, who can advise you on any issues concerning your standing in the class.

- ◇ **Active participation** at all meetings of this course is *mandatory*. You will not be graded on attendance per se, and merely showing up does not constitute active participation. For each class meeting you are expected to have read the assigned material, to have thought about it, and to be prepared to engage with it seriously during discussion. To help you prepare, I will post reading assignments online. I strongly recommend that you make a habit of *re-reading* crucial sections of each text; re-reading will not only lead you to discovering new details and forming new insights into the world of each text but will help you formulate ideas for your online discussion contributions and written assignments, including the final exercise. By preparing for, and participating in, class activities you can “earn” up to one percent of the final course grade per week. Of course, if you do not show up at all, you cannot participate, and so your attendance is imperative. Should an emergency arise, please make arrangements with the instructor as soon as possible. According to the USC policy on absences, if you have to miss a class meeting because you are observing a religious holy day, you must explicitly request such an excused absence by contacting your instructor *well in advance* of the day in question.
- ◇ **Online Discussion.** Starting with the second week of classes (*i.e.* Wednesday, September 5), you are required to post *at least one contribution per class meeting* to the online course bulletin board on Blackboard. All posts are due by 8 AM on each day our course meets; late submissions will not receive credit. Together, your weekly posts will account for fifteen percent of your final grade. This discussion board will serve as an extension of our classroom conversations; it offers you a key opportunity to try out a variety of ideas and share responses to the material we are studying. Because an instructor’s primary goal outside of class is to understand how the students are learning, I will read carefully all contributions to the discussion board but, as a rule, will not intervene in the discussion. If your question is meant for the instructor’s eyes only, please contact me directly (more on this below). Occasionally I will ask you to limit your remarks to a particular topic, but in general your contributions may address any aspect of the material we will have discussed in class by that time. The main *requirements for the content of your contributions* are that they be thoughtful, courteous, and engage directly some aspect of the course; that each post be *five or more full sentences* long; and that it follow the rules of academic English grammar and style. When you post your contribution, you can either begin a new thread or continue a discussion that someone else has already started. You could, for instance, follow up on a previous in-class discussion, offer an interpretation of the reading for that day, or point out a particularly interesting, strange, or enjoyable detail or passage and propose a way of making sense of it. You are invited and encouraged to read as many of your peers’ posts as possible, and to contribute more than one post per class meeting. You may want to *pose questions* about the readings and/or in-class conversations. When you do, please make certain that each question is *conceptual*, not simply factual – that is, be sure that you are asking about something that you cannot look up yourself in a reliable reference source. Before you submit the post, ask yourself: will your question help your peers understand or clarify the *concepts* we have been discussing? will it help your teacher recognize what larger issue is giving you trouble? Think of these online contributions as microarguments, perhaps even as microessays: this course is about understanding the workings of artistic events and imagining their possibilities, and you can explore a variety of these interpretive, analytical possibilities in your online posts.
- ◇ **Presentations.** You will have an opportunity to make three in-class presentations over the course of the semester; each will be worth five percent of the final grade. The first two will be prepared individually; the final one will involve collaborating with a classmate. All of these will be relatively short (seven to ten minutes) and will involve some amount of serious research. Presentation topics will be discussed and chosen in class early on in the term. The research you complete for these presentations may be used in your written assignments or the final exam.

- ◇ **Written Assignments.** You will complete two written assignments; detailed descriptions of each will be posted on our course website. The first will have a word-count minimum of 1500 words, will be worth fifteen percent of your final grade, will focus on a comparative close reading of passages from two different works of theater theory, and is due at 5 PM on **Friday, October 5**. The second will have a word-count minimum of 2500 words, will be worth twenty-five percent of your final grade, will examine a theoretical problem of your choice using a variety of primary sources – plays, theory, performances – as well as some amount of research into the problem’s larger historical and cultural context, and is due at 5 pm on **Friday, December 7**. All written work must be submitted via our Blackboard course site. It must scrupulously follow the detailed submission guidelines posted online; assignments that do not will be returned to you *with a failing grade* and no comments. ***No late submissions will be accepted*** and, as a rule, no extensions will be given. Grading rubrics and grade conversion guides appear online. As you draft your assignments, I encourage you to discuss them with me during office hours or via email.
- ◇ **The Final Exam** will be a take-home written exercise focusing on the text and theatrical embodiment of William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. It will be due online at 10 AM on **Monday, December 17** – the end of the official final-exam time slot for this course. A detailed description of the final exercise will be posted online by September 17.

• COURSE POLICIES

- ◇ **Academic Integrity.** This course is part of a thriving community in which ideas are cultivated and shared. Please do your part to make a viable, honest contribution to this intellectual community. All work you submit for this course must be created specifically and exclusively for this course; you may not submit for evaluation any work you completed for another class – at USC or elsewhere. Plagiarism, cheating, or any other form of academic dishonesty *will not be tolerated*. Penalties for academic dishonesty – which are serious – are outlined in the Student Conduct Code, Sections 11 and 14, and Appendix A (see *SCampus*, pp. 121-131, or www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/). Remember that plagiarism rules apply to images, sounds, and all online sources as well. Please take the time to consult the publications “Understanding and Avoiding Academic Dishonesty” and “Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism,” put together by the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and available online at www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/acadresources.html. The University is committed to the general principles of academic honesty, which include respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. Students who take this course are expected to understand these principles and abide by them. All work submitted for this course may be subject to an originality review as performed by Turnitin technologies (turnitin.com) to find textual similarities with other Internet content or previously submitted student work. Students of this course retain the copyright of their own original work, and Turnitin is not permitted to use student-submitted work for any other purpose than (a) performing an originality review of the work, and (b) including that work in the database against which it checks other student-submitted work.
- ◇ **Academic Accommodations.** Students requesting academic accommodations based on disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please ensure that this letter is delivered to Prof. Wolfson as early as possible in the semester. DSP is located in the Student Union (STU), Room 301. The office is open 8:30 AM – 5:30 PM, Monday – Friday; the main phone number is 213.740.0776.
- ◇ **Academic Courtesy and Civility.** As a gesture of respect for your peers and your teacher please remember to turn off your cell phones and MP3 players before the beginning of class and do not consume food in class. (Drinking, if it is done discreetly – nonalcoholic beverages, I hope – is fine.) During our class meetings, please speak only when you have been given the floor. All forms of private communication, including electronic, should be conducted outside of class. Computers, including laptops, are permitted for note-taking and other class-related work *only*. During discussion, please let every speaker finish his/her thought, and formulate your contributions in a way that addresses the substance of the matter at hand rather than the personalities of the participants.
- ◇ **Staying in Touch.** Please come by during office hours to discuss readings, assignments, or any other aspect of the course. Please note that all office hours are by appointment. You can make an appointment in person, before or after class; via e-mail; or by phone. I check email regularly, and it is usually the best way to contact me. Feel free to email me to make an appointment, ask questions or share ideas (about readings, assignments, presentations or any other course-related matters). When you write, please observe all conventions of written English, including spelling and punctuation, and allow at least twenty-four hours for a response to your query / request.

• A PREVIEW OF COMING ATTRACTIONS

This is a *preliminary overview* of course topics and assignments. From time to time during the semester it may become necessary to make adjustments in the syllabus. More detailed, and most recently updated, reading and writing assignments will be posted on the course website; please check the site regularly. In all assignment listings, texts are identified by author's last name, and *CP* refers to the course pack. Please prepare assignments for the dates under which they are listed, *e.g.* read the first two acts of Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* (pp. 3-20 in the course pack) and the first chapter of Stanislavsky's *An Actor Prepares* (pp. 1-12 in our edition) *for* Wednesday, August 29.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Discussion</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
August 27 Monday	In Place of an Introduction: Revolutions in Texts and Performance	
August 29 Wednesday	Modernity and "Realism": the Chekhov Legacy	• Read Chekhov, <i>CP</i> 3-20; Stanislavsky 1-12
September 3 Monday	<i>NO CLASS</i> <i>LABOR DAY</i>	• Start Chekhov, <i>CP</i> 21-34; Stanislavsky 13-35
September 5 Wednesday	Konstantin Stanislavsky's "System:" Faith, Truth, Emotion	• Read Stanislavsky 13-35, 79-102, 139-176; Chekhov, <i>CP</i> 21-34, re-read <i>CP</i> 3-20
September 10 Monday	Stanislavsky's "System:" Communion, Motive, Objective	• Read Stanislavsky 177-214, 263-270, 281-302
September 12 Wednesday	Stanislavsky's "System:" Thresholds of the Subconscious	• Read Stanislavsky 303-336; Brook 9-41
September 17 Monday	Modernity and Convention: Vsevolod Meyerhold Reimagines the Actor <i>Final Exercise Description Posted</i>	• Read Craig, <i>CP</i> 35-38; Meyerhold, <i>CP</i> 42-62
September 19 Wednesday	Theatrical October: Meyerhold Stages (the) Revolution	• Read Meyerhold, <i>CP</i> 62-72; Gogol, <i>CP</i> 88-95 • Begin <i>reading and re-reading</i> Shakespeare 3-98
September 24 Monday	Theater of the "Social Mask:" Meyerhold Deconstructs (the) Classics	• Read Gogol, <i>CP</i> 96-130; Meyerhold, <i>CP</i> 73-85 • Write first assignment

<u>Date</u>	<u>Discussion</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
September 26 Wednesday	Modernity and the Epic: Bertolt Brecht's "Theater for Instruction"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Benjamin, <i>CP</i> 131-134, Brecht 136-152 • <i>Write</i> first assignment
October 1 Monday	Brecht's Gests: The Theater of Alienation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Brecht, <i>CP</i> 153-181 • <i>Write</i> first assignment
October 3 Wednesday	Brecht vs. Brecht: Scripting Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Brecht, <i>Caucasian Chalk Circle</i> 7-99 • <i>Write</i> first assignment: complete draft; revise and turn in by 5 PM on Friday, October 5
October 8 Monday	Modernity and Tragedy: Performance as a Philosophical Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Nietzsche 19-90
October 10 Wednesday	Nietzsche's Irony: The Possibilities of the Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Nietzsche 91-146, 3-17
October 15 Monday	The Esthetics of Cruelty: Antonin Artaud Reinvents Alchemy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Artaud 7-52, 74-100
October 17 Wednesday	Theater's Double: Language and Musculature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Artaud 53-73, 101-141 • Continue to <i>read and re-read</i> Shakespeare 3-98
October 22 Monday	Retracing Cruelty in the Politics of Performance: Jean Genet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Genet 6-96
October 24 Wednesday	Modernity and Ritual: Jerzy Grotowski's "Poor" Theater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Grotowski, <i>CP</i> 184-188; Flaszen, <i>CP</i> 189-193
October 29 Monday	Grotowski's Laboratory of Holiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Grotowski, <i>CP</i> 196-219; Brook 42-64
October 31 Wednesday	Reaching Beyond Performance: Grotowski's Experiments in Being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Grotowski, <i>CP</i> 222-240

<u>Date</u>	<u>Discussion</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
November 5 Monday	Modernity and Experience: Peter Brook and the Idea of Immediacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Brook 65-141
November 7 Wednesday	Inventing the Impossible: Tadeusz Kantor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Kantor 242-256 • <i>Write</i> second assignment
November 12 Monday	Revising the Absurd: Thresholds of Post-Modernity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Witkiewicz, 275-291 • <i>Write</i> second assignment
November 14 Wednesday	Theater as Death: Kantor's Phenomenology of Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Kantor, CP 256-271 • <i>Write</i> second assignment
November 19 Monday	Modernity and the Machine: Heiner Müller after Brecht	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Müller, CP 293-312 • Continue to <i>read and re-read</i> Shakespeare 3-98
November 21 Wednesday	Through the Iron Curtain: Müller Between East and West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Müller, CP 314-327 • <i>Write</i> second assignment
November 26 Monday	A Song Without Music: What Robert Wilson Learned from Müller	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Wilson, CP 331-366 • <i>Write</i> second assignment
November 28 Wednesday	Wilson's Architecture of the Eclectic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Glass, CP 367-371 • <i>Write</i> second assignment
December 3 Monday	Wilson's Theater of Images and the Fate of the <i>Gesamtkunstwerk</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Wilson, CP 374-397 • <i>Write</i> second assignment
December 5 Wednesday	In Place of a Conclusion: "All Theater is Revolutionary Theater"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Re-read</i> Shakespeare 3-98 • <i>Write</i> second assignment: complete draft; revise and submit by 5 PM on Friday, December 7
December 17 Monday	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>10 AM</i> FINAL EXAM DUE ONLINE</p>	