The Theater of Theory: Performance in the 20th Century

The twentieth century not only saw a flourishing of ideas about performance, but the proliferation of performative ideas; theoretical texts that seemed to borrow from the energy and style of modernist art works. By the late 20th century, Hal Foster could refer to theory itself as “modernism by other means.” This course examines both theories of performance and theoretical performances, examining how the two trends - theorizing performance and performing theory - intersected and informed one another. Drawing on readings from Marxism, Feminism, Hermeneutics and Psychoanalysis, as well as playwright/theorists like Artaud, performance theorists like Peggy Phelan, and finally, performing theorists like Chris Kraus, our goal is to come away with a much clearer picture of just how deep an impact these ideas made in the 20th Century, and what of them survives today.

The research component of the course will help us better understand both our primary texts and their historical contexts. In addition to learning how to engage with arguments put forth in academic articles, students will also learn how to read and evaluate theoretical texts as well as book reviews from contemporary periodicals. At the conclusion of the course, students will be able to use a broad range of secondary sources and will know how to use these sources to advance their own arguments. Research assignments and discussions of secondary criticism will prepare students to produce their final research papers for the course.

**Requirements:**
Regular reading, attendance, and participation; completion of short research and writing assignments; attendance at research session in Widener library; 20-25 page final research paper (partial and full drafts due over the course of the term) including a bibliography with 10+ annotations (also due in segments over the course of the term).

If you do not hand in a final paper, you will not pass the class.

Required Tutorial-Wide Meeting #1
Tuesday, February 16, 4-5pm, Barker 133

Required Tutorial-Wide Meeting #2
Tuesday, March 22, 4-5pm, Barker 133

**Primary Texts:**
NB: There is some flexibility regarding the selection of primary readings, which may be adjusted according to student interest.

Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double* (1938)
Eugene O’Neil, *The Hairy Ape* (1922)
Jean Genet, *The Maids* (1947)
Peter Weiss, *Marat/Sade* (1964)
Secondary Texts:
All critical selections will be photocopied and distributed in the prior week’s class. Different secondary readings may be substituted for those listed, though the quantity of reading will remain roughly the same.

Recommended Secondary Materials:

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS:

Week One: Alain Badiou, from The Handbook of Inaesthetics (2004) “Art and Philosophy” pp 1 – 16

Week Two: Eugene O’Neil, The Hairy Ape (1922)
- From Martin Heidegger, Being and Time “Da-sein's Attestation of An Authentic Potentiality-for-being, and resoluteness” pp. 268-301
* 2-page close reading assignment due *

Week Three: Sophie Treadwell, Machinal (1928)
- Gyogy Lukacs, from History and Class Consciousness “The Phenomenon of Reification” pp 83-110
* Select, summarize, and evaluate one critical article about a text we have read thus far *

Week Four: Bertolt Brecht, The Measures Taken (1930)
- Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer”
* 4-page paper due in class *

Week Five: Antonin Artaud, The Theater and its Double (1938)
- student-selected reviews

Week Six: Jean Genet, The Balcony (1957)
* Mock Topic assignment due *

** Week Six: Research Session at Widener Library **

Week Seven: Peter Weiss, Marat/Sade (1964)
- George Bataille, “The Use Value of D.E.F. DeSade”
-from Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin/White Masks* pp. 1-28 “Introduction + The Negro and Language”

* Selection of author(s) and text(s) for final paper (1-2 page prospectus); partial bibliography with 5+ annotations due *


* Partial draft (10 pages) due; bibliography with 10+ annotations *

Tuesday, April 12

Week Eleven: Sarah Kane *Cleansed* (1998)  
-Peggy Phelan, “The Ontology of Performance”


* Complete draft due *

Week Thirteen: * Student paper workshop *

* Final paper due in my mailbox by 5pm on Tuesday, May 3 *

Final Essays Due (to department and to tutor)

Junior Tutorial Conference
Tuesday, May 3, 4-6:30pm OR Wednesday, May 4, 4-6:30pm, Thompson Room