Boston University Study Abroad London

Contemporary British Theatre
CFA TH 508 (Elective A)
Spring 2013

Instructor Information
A. Name Professor

Course Objectives
TH 508 British Contemporary Theatre and Performance examines the production of current theatre and performance in London with an emphasis on staged performance and written texts. The course concentrates on the witness of live performance, the discussion and exploration of the cultural context of performances seen and the development of historical understanding of the emergence of the phenomena called ‘British Contemporary Theatre’. This category is not taken as a given but a term to be contested and argued over with a view to developing the student’s coherence of critical aptitude and expression. This is high level course and while it is unlikely the student will have encountered the specifics of British theatre before there is the expectation that students will be in a position to frame arguments, to think critically and to express themselves clearly and confidently with regard to their own particular experience of artistic practice as engaged with through the course.

Course Overview
TH 508 British Contemporary Theatre and Performance takes a beginning point from post second world war political, social and cultural context and the theatre that emerged from the generation of 1950s writing including John Osborne with Look Back in Anger and Samuel Beckett with Waiting for Godot. The course additionally takes its bearings from the theatre that is currently in production in London drawing on a range of practices including mainstream and fringe venues. On occasions set texts will provide complimentary evidence to consider alongside productions seen. These will be drawn from set plays or critical texts and material drawn from the daily newspapers.

Methodology
The course will be taught through a combination of lecture and seminar session. Each session will include direct informational input from the tutor raising historical, cultural and critical questions for discussion as well as seminar session dedicated to more open critical discussion of the plays seen together as a group. Presence at evening theatre events (see following schedule) as well as attendance at all classes is imperative for successful completion of the course. Theatre visits are working sessions (as well as social occasions) and as such are factored into the hours of the course. Taking into account a proportion of ‘theatre hours’ the course delivers over the required minimum of class time. To ensure students are able to arrive at performances and
prepare for the following day’s class some adjustments may be made to course schedule as the course proceeds, each will be notified to all students well in advance.

All students are expected to complete six hours of reading and writing outside class time in each week. This reading could usefully be done using the modest in scale, but excellent library resources either side of the group sessions. NB: Please note carefully the important site visits that act as a critical aspect of the course. These do not take place at Harrington Gardens and students should check locations of sessions and start times carefully especially if, for whatever reason, they have missed the class before the site visit. This is particularly important for the site visit to the Royal Courts of Justice.

**Readings**

Additional readings may be posted on the course webpage: [https://lms.bu.edu](https://lms.bu.edu) (you must be logged in to view materials).

Reading from the course webpage as instructed is essential for class preparation and should be completed before the session indicated.

Osborne, John: *Look Back In Anger*

Designated Passages from following works as course proceeds (there are multiple copies available on loan in the BU London library):


For students requiring background context reading:

Innes, Christopher, *Modern British Drama, 1890-1990*.

Students will be guided to other reading as the course proceeds. Students should consider theatre events as primary source of research. While they are not read as texts on the page, performances (form is at the heart of the word) are structured as signifying systems that can be read like any other text for meanings as well as experienced as the generator of feelings and affects.

**Assessment Pattern**

50% A 2000 word research paper including bibliography and notes exploring a specific topic that has emerged from study and theatre witness as part of the course. Credit will be given to students who respond to the assessment criteria below.

25% A 20 minute oral presentation made with notes (but not read) based on the Theatre Capital presentation made in Session 2. Students are asked to form pairs with whom they know they can work effectively. Presentations will be made in Session 7 (October 1st).

25% Class participation, active presence, quality of listening and peer group support, discussion contributions.

**Grading Criteria**

In all assessment elements of the course a combination of 5 criteria of achievement are assessed:
COCOE:
Coherence of thought
Organisation of materials
Critical aptitude
Originality of perception
Effort in preparation and participation

Grading
Please refer to the Academic Handbook for detailed grading criteria, attendance requirements and policies on plagiarism: http://www.bu.edu/london/current-semester

Attendance Policy

Classes
All Boston University London Programme students are expected to attend each and every class session, tutorial, and field trip in order to fulfill the required course contact hours and receive course credit. Any student that has been absent from two class sessions (whether authorised or unauthorised) will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their continued participation on the programme.

Authorised Absence:
Students who expect to be absent from any class should notify a member of Academic Affairs and complete an Authorized Absence Approval Form 10 working days in advance of the class date (except in the case of absence due to illness, for which students should submit the Authorized Absence Approval Form with the required doctor’s note as soon as possible). Please note: Submitting an Authorised Absence Approval Form does not guarantee an authorised absence

Students may apply for an authorised absence only under the following circumstances:
- Illness, supported by a local London doctor’s note (submitted with Authorised Absence Approval Form).
- Important placement event that clashes with a class (verified by internship supervisor)
- Special circumstances which have been approved by the Directors (see note below).

The Directors will only in the most extreme cases (for example, death in close family) allow students to leave the programme early or for a significant break.

Unauthorised Absence:
Any student to miss a class due to an unauthorised absence will receive a 4% grade penalty to their final grade for the course whose class was missed. This grade penalty will be applied by the Academic Affairs office to the final grade at the end of the course. As stated above, any student that has missed two classes will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their participation on the programme as excessive absences may result in a ‘Fail’ in the class and therefore expulsion from the programme.

CFA TH 508 SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND THEATRE VISITS

Spring 2013

Tuesday 22 January
Session 1: Live Art and the Visual Arts

NB Class will take place at Tate Modern (ten minute walk from Southwark Station on Jubilee Tube Line) not at Harrington Gardens, nor at Tate Britain which is a different gallery in Pimlico.

10.30am NB Time of class.

Meet at Tate Modern main bookshop at bottom of main ramp entrance to ground floor (not at small bookshop on first floor by entrance from Millennium Bridge). Come prepared with a pen and notebook but do not carry a heavy bag as you will be on your feet for a couple of hours.

Tate Modern, Live Art and the Visual Arts: A group visit to Tate Modern to explore the performative strand within contemporary visual arts. A worksheet will be distributed on the day of the visit to maximise the effectiveness of the visit.

The Tate session will run from 10.30am until 12.45pm. The afternoon session will begin at 2.00pm at Harrington Gardens which will be followed after an hour’s break (time for you to change, get some tea) with our first Theatre visit (to Covent garden). So, do come prepared for a busy day of work.

Session 2: Drama, Theatre and Performance in the Expanded Field (2.00pm, Harrington Gardens, SW7)

Introduction to Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies: readings: Yates, Ridout, Brecht

Subject position and performance.

Theatre in the expanded field of performance: Subject Position and Perspective as sources and modes of critical response

Readings from: Walser, Dickens, Schechner

Video Images as sources of performativity

Reading and Exercise for Session 3: Review reading and notes from Session 1 and draw a Venn diagram laying out the relations as you understand them between Drama, Theatre, Performance, Dance, Mime, Representation, Visual Arts, Sport, Ceremony etc.

Theatre Visit 1: The Old King, Linbury Studio Theatre, Covent Garden Opera House, 7.45pm. Arrive no later than 7.30pm.

They say:

Conceived by Miguel Moreira and Romeu Runa

In a bleak setting that evokes the first, or perhaps the last days of the world, a man slowly stands up in the face of seemingly terrible adversity and tries to construct a thought, a speech that might explain. In a sensual and defiant confrontation with his environment he tries to hang on to his humanity, as the landscape around him changes colour and form.

Implacable, ferocious and tragic, The Old King explores what happens when things collapse,
when language fails. Guided and produced by Les Ballets C de la B founder and artistic director, Alain Plâtel, this remarkable work is the creation of Portuguese artists and C de la B collaborators, Romeu Runa and Miguel Moreira. A hit at the 2012 Festival d’Avignon.

Contains some disturbing images. Suitable for 14 years and over. Unsuitable for children.

Monday 28 January

Session 3: Theatre Capital: The City Performs

Theatre Capital: The City Performs: Presentation and Preparation for student Theatre Capital Presentation in 8th session of class.


and

Consider your notes from the Theatre Capital presentation, form working groups for project and define your possible areas of interest.

Theatre Visit 2: In The Beginning was the End. DreamThinkSpeak. Timed Entry between 7.15 and 7.45. Meet at Somerset House, Strand. Nearest Tube: Temple Station. Turn right out of tube. Walk up steps and up road ahead of you rising up to Strand. Turn left into Strand and walk along until on right there is St Mary Le Strand Church in middle of Strand. Somerset House is on your left. Arch entrance through to Somerset House. Meet at Fernandez and Wells Café to left inside courtyard.

This is one of the first projects directed by King’s Cultural Institute at Kings College London where I work. This is also the world premiere of this piece so it will be interesting to see how it works, and if it works!

They say:

In the Beginning was the End: dreamthinksspeak at Somerset House

A dreamthinksspeak production

presented by Somerset House and King’s Cultural Institute

'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.' Book of Revelation: Chapter 22; verse 13

Take a journey through the maze-like underground passages and unseen spaces of King's College and Somerset House into a world of calamitous accidents and divine revelations.

Mixing Leonardo-inspired hydraulics and modern mechanical engineering with dreamthinksspeak’s special blend of film, installation and live performance, it reveals a vision of the world either on the verge of collapse – or the brink of rebirth.

Acclaimed site-responsive theatre company dreamthinksspeak return to Somerset House after the sell-out success of their 2004 show Don’t Look Back.
Led by artistic director Tristan Sharps, the company is internationally recognised for its site-responsive performances in a range of unusual spaces, including an underground abattoir in Clerkenwell, a disused paper factory in Moscow and the Old Treasury Building in Perth, Australia.

"Intricately put together. Beautiful, witty and deeply unnerving." *Time Out* on *Don’t Look Back* at Somerset House, 2004

**Tuesday 29 January**

**Session 4: Lay Theatre**

Seminar discussion of *In the Beginning was the End*.

Discussion of Lay Theatre, from *Theatre & Everyday Life*

Screening of *Young at Heart*

They say:

When Bob Cilman and Judith Sharpe organized the Young@Heart (Y@H) in 1982 all of the members lived in an elderly housing project in Northampton, MA called the Walter Salvo House. The first group included elders who lived through both World Wars. One of our members had fought in the Battle of the Somme as a 16 year old and another, Anna Main, lost her husband in the First World War. Anna was a stand-up comic who at 88 told jokes that only she could get away with. She sang with us until she was 100. We celebrated her 100th birthday with a parade downtown. We actually had to reschedule the parade for a year later when her family informed us that we had the date wrong and she was only 99. This initial group also included Diamond Lillian Aubrey who came on our first two European tours and wowed the audiences with her deadpan version of Manfred Mann’s “Doo Wah Diddy”. In later years she appeared “on stage” via video, performing the Stone’s “You Can’t Always Get What You Want”.

By 1983 our original group was ready to create our first stage production. We enlisted the support of Roy Faudree from No Theater to stage “Stompin’ at the Salvo”. No Theater was doing the most intriguing theater work in town and I was stunned when Roy agreed to stage the first show. That first production was memorable for the sensation and buzz it created in town. The show sold out four times and brought in a broad cross section of younger and older people from the community. It also brought us new performers. In early 1984 Eileen Hall, Warren Clark, and Ralph Intorcio joined the group. Warren and Ralph were both very good at doing female impersonations. Warren took on the persona of Sophie Tucker, a popular vaudevillian stage performer and Ralph did a send-up of Carol Channing’s “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend”. Eileen was born and raised in London and brought us an array of different routines, including strip, mime and the song “Nobody Loves a Fairy When She’s ...Ninety.” Y@H decided to combine these performances with a group of Latino break-dancers from another local housing project. The result was “Boola Boola Bimini Bop”. These two shows were the first of many collaborations Y@H created with different arts groups in town. A few others included “Oh No a Condo” in 1988, with Cambodian folk artists and punk rockers; in 1991 “Louis Lou I – A Revolting Musical” reunited us with Roy and No Theater for a huge production (over 100 people involved). The piece was a re-telling of the French Revolution using the songs of Sinatra. In 1994 Y@H created "Flaming Saddles", a big campy production with the Pioneer Valley Gay Men’s Chorus written by Sally Rubenstone. There were many other community collaborations along the way.

In 1996 No Theater was in Rotterdam performing in the annual R Festival. Roy asked the organizers about the theme for the next year’s festival. When he discovered that it was Forever Young, he told the organizers about Young@Heart and plans began to bring the group over to Europe. This was the first time we would create a stage production that just included members of the chorus. Mixing songs and costumes from past shows with some new music we created Young@Heart in “Road to Heaven” staged by No Theater. The response was phenomenal and the chorus went on to 12 more tours of Europe, Australia and Canada from 1997-2004. We performed “Road to Heaven” at the Lyric Hammersmith in November 2000 with the support of the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT). It was in London that the groundwork was laid for Young@Heart in “Road to Nowhere” stage by No Theater. A consortium of presenters including LIFT, The Rotterdamse Schouwburg, The Hebbel Theater in Berlin, and Brugge 2002 commissioned the new work. The show premiered fall 2004 in the Oude Luxor Theater in Rotterdam presented by the Rotterdamse Schouwburg. “Road to Nowhere” toured to Zurich, Berlin, Dublin, Angers and Strasbourg after a 12-show run in London in 2005. In July 2009 Young@Heart in “End of the Road” by No Theater premiered at the Manchester International Festival in Manchester, England. Young@Heart performed "End
of the Road” at the Rotterdamse Schouwburg in Rotterdam, the Netherlands and the Vooruit Theatre in Ghent, Belgium in September 2009. “End of the Road”'s US premier was at St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn, New York in April 2010 and we are in working to bring it to Poland in Summer 2011.

Y@H receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Korein Foundation and the City of Northampton.

Alive and Well, the Y@H in concert, features songs from past productions and also allows us to experiment with new music in front of a live audience. We’ve performed Alive and Well on college campuses and clubs in the US and the Glor-Irish Music Centre, Ennis, Ireland; Wilshire Theater, Los Angeles; Capitol Theatre, Salt Lake City; Somerville Theatre, Massachusetts; Beacon Theatre, New York City; Ellington Theater, Washington, D.C; the Newport Folk Festival, the Colonial Theater, Pittsfield, MA, the Barnstable Performing Arts Center and Mechanics Hall in Worcester. Young@Heart is Alive and Well also performed at the Warner Theatre in Washington, DC on December 5, 2009 and the Hatboro-Horsham High School Theater in Horsham, PA, Dec. 6, 2009. Young@Heart toured to Japan and New Zealand in the spring and winter of 2010, in between we toured to up to Canada & upstate NY, went all the way out to Boston and Cape Cod, too. This year, we've already been to New Hampshire and Maine. We'll perform in Connecticut and then return to Worcester this Spring. In the fall, we plan to hit the Mid-Atlantic states.

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The 2006 Walker George documentary “Young @ Heart”, originally broadcast on Channel 4 television in the UK, won two Rose d’Or awards, the LA Film Festival Audience Award, screened at Sundance in 2008 and in April 2008 Fox Searchlight released it in North American cinemas. More recently the film has been released in cinemas around the world including the UK, France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Germany, New Zealand, and Japan. In 2008 the film won the Audience Award at the Sydney Film Festival, the Paris Cinema International Film Festival, Ghent Film Festival, Atlanta Film Festival, Bergen International Film Festival, Warsaw Film Festival and others. The film aired in January 2010 on the PBS series “Independent Lens”.

Reading for Session 5: From assigned reading

Monday 4th February

Session 5: Theatre & Live Arts

Introduction to Live Art and Performance Art.

Seminar Presentation: DIY Performance Pack

This presentation will take the form of a performative lecture written for the class by the artist Joshua Sofaer. The tutor, acting as a proxy for the artist, will present images from Sofaer’s staged lecture, The DIY Performance Pack, and discuss performances that move way beyond the confines of the theatrical stage. These include the work of Marina Abramovich, Matthew Barney and la Ribot.

Reading for Session 6: From assigned reading

Tuesday 5th February

Session 6: Theatre of Law

NB this session will NOT take place at Harrington Gardens but at the Royal Courts of Justice, the Strand. Entrance from 2.00pm. nearest tube: Temple. Turn right out of Temple tube, go up stairs and up street ahead. Turn right at lights at top and Royal Courts are on the far side of the road about 100 metres along past.

Meet promptly at the main entrance door. ensure you bring the following notes with you for guidance as once inside the court rooms there is no means to reconnect the group. You are at liberty to leave when you wish having followed the following instructions:

Theatricality is inherent to state apparatuses of law, military, and education. The Law Courts on
the Strand, Holland Park Comprehensive School, the House of Commons, Wormwood Scrubs Prison or the Anatomy Theatre at Guy’s Hospital, London Bridge, would all give insights to the formal relationship between scopic control, auditory engagement, audience/witness policing.

Each of these more or less performative sites raise questions about theatricality and should be separated out from, and carefully distinguished from the licensed regimes of theatre. They are not theatres, and all the world is not a stage despite what someone said, rather there are specific genealogical continuities and interruptions identifiable between these various and wholly distinct arenas for practice and power.

Site Visit:

There are at least two ways to engage with this site visit and as long as you fulfill both aspects of this session you are liberty to move about as you wish. The goal of this site visit is to observe and reflect upon the performative nature of legal practices. The choices you make during the session should further this goal rather than the general sense of interest in gaining access to high court proceedings (fascinating as they are). You are at liberty to leave when the sessions break but do stay on if you are engaged with something interesting so that can to make as much use of the court sitting as possible.

As we know from the Theatre Capital presentation in week 2 ‘all the world is not a stage’ and you are therefore advised to move on from one focus to another if it does not seem to be delivering anything of performance interest or understanding. Some of the court proceedings could be inherently dramatic (probably criminal cases are the best bet here) while those proceedings of civil courts might be bogged down in the detailed minutae of legal argument. It might of course be the other way around – last week I saw a fascinating defence of copyright with one barrister defending a computing gaming company against another in a very heightened defence.

Practicalities: Aim to be at the Courts at 2.00pm.

When you arrive at the Courts you will be security checked so carry as little as possible with you. When you have been security checked you should all check the Daily Cause List to see the timings of the various courts and their morning/afternoon business schedule. The Cause List notes the proceedings and court numbers for the day and will not mean that much to you on first sight. The Royal Courts of Justice are an Appeal Court and combine hearings of a civil and criminal nature in different courts. You are free to walk in all public areas, which are surprisingly open.

Route 1: Tour

When you have checked the Cause List if you do not see a session that catches your eye follow the walk in the booklet provided. Ensure that you take careful notice of the iconography of legal practices on the walls as you move around, check out the legal costuming area on the first floor at the end of the main gallery, observe the architecture of the Courts of Justice, find your way through to the Bear Garden (not Beer) and consider how this operates, check for yourselves the ceremony of the Quit Rents and think about the relationship here between traditional performance ceremony and legal power. While you are walking you might also look out or the name of the current Queen’s Remembrancer and later try to find out what the remembrancer does and why what they are remembering.

Route 2: Observation of Proceeding
Do not worry if a case does not jump out at you to see. Find your way to a selected or random court-room and look through the window to see what is happening. If the door is open go into the court and sit in one of the two back rows open to the public. Look at everything that is happening in the courtroom, from costuming to space, from architecture to gestures, listen to language carefully and the rhetorics of advocacy and defence.

The point here is not to agree or not whether there is a theatrical element to this, it is self evident that there is and always has been, but rather how specifically these sites operate as sites of performance, how performance itself shapes the discourses that are underway there and how your understanding from reading widely in this course the very form of the law itself is caught up with questions of performance.

Reflection

When you leave write up your notes as soon as you can while they are fresh. Check the bookshop for any additional material if you are interested in the essay question on this site.

Reading for Session 7: From assigned reading

Theatre Visit 3: Privates on Parade, 7.30pm, Noel Coward Theatre (arrangements to be confirmed)

Monday 11th February

Session 7: The Theatre & Its Poor: From Occupy London to Les Misérables

Seminar discussion of Privates on Parade

Politics and Theatre

The Brechtian Tradition

The Royal Court and Post War Radicalism

Reading for session 8: preparation of Theatre Capital presentations.

Tuesday 12th February

Session 8: Theatre Capital Presentations

Theatre Capital Student Presentations: A twenty-minute oral presentation (15 minutes delivery, 5 minutes for questions) in pairs based on earlier Theatre Capital photo session working with a limit of 12 images.

Students should ensure they have arranged their audio-visual needs, lap-top and projection requirements and tested them for this morning and afternoon of presentations prior to the day of presentations. Wherever possible, students should organise themselves in an order that allows for the least changing of equipment during the morning and afternoon.

Reading for Session 9: Preparation of Research Essays
Friday 15th February

Session 9: Choreographies of Risk

Review of Class

Risk and Limits in Performance


**Theatre Visit 4:** *Two Cigarettes in the Dark / Vollmond*, Pina Bausch Wuppertal Company, Sadlers Wells Theatre, 7.30pm. Nearest Tube: Angel (Northern Line city branch).

Please ensure you do not make other arrangements for this night as this 4th and last theatre visit is significant.

All students must be prepared and available in person to submit a hard copy of their research paper in to the Student Affairs Office between **10am - 4pm on Tuesday 19th February**.

**Reading for class:**

Assigned reading will be offered from on line resource pack and from library from the following works which are all held in hard copy.


NOTES: