Political Theatre

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
What makes theatre political? How has the politics of theatre been imagined and practiced in different times? What hopes for changing the world does theatre dramatize? What does the study of theatre teach us about politics? How does the theatre become a productive site for representing, and even enacting, political change? This course explores these questions by reading plays from three periods in which theatrical production played a significant role in the politics of its world--ancient Greece, Renaissance England, and our contemporary globalized world.

COURSE AIMS:
As the above description and the schedule of readings below suggests, the primary objective of this course is to introduce students to plays that not only address a range of political issues (for example, about race, gender, sexuality, class, violence, the governing of subjects, and the production of good citizens) but also attempt to enact change and engage the community. To accomplish this aim, we will be reading innovative plays alongside theorists who investigate and imagine the political potential of theatre and performance. We will have to become careful readers ourselves, attentive to the forms, strategies, and content of the plays we are discussing. Much of the course will focus on close reading and careful analysis of the plays’ engagements with politics and their creative approaches to understanding and representing them. By attending plays and participating in experimental theatrical exercises, we will be able both to think about what makes theatre political and to experience its effects through our own creative actions. We will together attend Gallatin’s production of Antigone and at least one play outside of the university. Students will be encouraged to explore alternative theatrical sites in NYC with the help of our orientation leaders, Austin Rieders and Nicole Sandry.

Required Texts:
All texts should be available at the NYU bookstore and at Shakespeare & Co. (716 Broadway.). In addition to the texts listed below, I will be distributing additional materials.
1) Sophocles, Antigone
2) Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice: Texts and Contexts (This edition is required.)
3) Brecht, The Good Person of Szechwan
4) Odet, Waiting for Lefty and Other Plays
5) Churchill, Top Girls
6) Kane, Blasted
7) Hoffman, As Is
8) Anna Deveare Smith, Fires in the Mirror
COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:

"Political Theatre" is a seminar that will develop through class discussion. Like the theatre we will be studying, it is the product of collaborative engagement. Thus, regular attendance (including arriving to class on time) and thoughtful engagement with the course materials are crucial to its success. Be generous with your ideas and questions, and show up with texts in your hand and ready to think in new ways. Careful preparation is a key component of participation. Complete all readings, viewings, and assignments before you come to class in order to be ready to participate in that day's discussion. Come to class with questions you have about the material and/or with specific issues or passages from works you would like to discuss. Be ready to contribute meaningfully to our discussions. Preparation thus means not just having completed the assignment, but having engaged with the materials thoughtfully and actively.

If you are absent, I will assume you have a good reason. You do not need to tell me why. (The exception is if something very out of the ordinary happens that requires you to miss more than two classes in a row.) The course, however, moves quickly and the material is challenging, and those that miss seminar will likely find it difficult to keep up. Whenever you miss class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed from one of your classmates and for keeping up with the assignments.

Performances: Each of you will participate in the performance of a short scene from one of the plays we are reading. I will divide you into three groups based as much as possible on your interests. (The three plays will be: *I Will Marry When I Want*, *Waiting for Lefty*, and *Top Girls*.) I will ask you to turn in your preferences by September 11th so that I can put you in groups quickly, thus giving you as much time as possible to prepare for our workshop with Fiasco Theatre. As a group, you will select the scene or very short parts of different scenes you want to perform. Each group will need to meet at least once outside of class before the workshop to choose scenes and to discuss what issues you want to emphasize in your performance and how you might do so, as well as to divide up parts and practice your lines. Some of you might decide that you would prefer to take on a role that involves directing or blocking the scene rather than performing in it. This advance preparation will be crucial to the workshop we have with members of Fiasco Theatre, an exciting opportunity for you to work with members of a professional theatre company. You will get to experience the process through which lines from a play get brought to life. This assignment will also allow you to experience the collaborative effort that produces theatre as well as what it feels like to embody and perform lines from a play with other actors. The class as a whole will benefit from seeing parts of the scenes performed. Your participation will contribute significantly to your participation grade. You will need to meet again after the workshop to prepare your scenes, which you will perform on the day we are discussing the play. Each member of the group will write a short response about your experience participating in this collaborative work. This will be due at the class meeting after the performance so that you can reflect on the experience of the performance itself.
Valerie Forman

WRITTEN WORK: A variety of forms of written work will be required for the class. I detail them below. All written work will share in the project of moving toward accomplishing the stated goals of the course, of making connections among the different works and discussions of them, and, of course, making new discoveries about why studying this material matters to us. All written work should typed and double-spaced in 12-point font with standard one-inch margins.

Reading Responses: In order to help you prepare to participate in discussion and to give you the practice of writing on a regular basis about course materials, you will also be asked to complete a response paper roughly every other week. This paper is an approximately 350 word critical response to the materials assigned since the previous response paper was due. These are typed, thoughtful engagements that address a specific issue, question, or section of a work that you would like to explore. They may also engage with issues raised in class discussion. For some classes, I will assign a specific topic or approach. For others, the choice will be yours. Each response paper should conclude with a discussion question. This part of the assignment will help us to bring your questions and concerns to the center of class. Due dates by which responses must be turned in are listed on the syllabus. Response papers are due on the day that the work you are writing about will be discussed. In most cases, you can choose the work and thus the day during the (usually) two-week period when you will be writing. Please number and date your response papers.

Papers:
You will be writing three analytical papers for this course. The first paper is a four-page close analysis of a scene from *The Merchant of Venice* or *Antigone*. The second paper (5 pages) will ask you to apply the theories of performance we have read to one of the plays or to develop your own theory from one of the plays. I will be suggesting paper topics and formats based on class discussions and your interests as they develop throughout the semester for the second and final papers. The final paper will be six pages. All papers will be analytical, but analysis by no means excludes creativity. Due dates for papers are listed on the syllabus. I will be giving you handouts to assist you in writing the papers and to explain the assignments in greater detail.

Grades are based on the quality of all written work (response papers and papers) as well as class participation. The following is a rough breakdown of how much each category is worth. If your work gets stronger as the course progresses, I will weigh your later work more heavily. (Attendance and Participation: 30%; Response Papers: 25%; Papers: 45%).

Disabilities: If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me soon.

Plagiarism: As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html](http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html) for a full
description of the academic integrity policy.

Do not plagiarize. If you take an idea or more than two or three words directly from any source (including the Internet), you must cite the source in a footnote. If you are not sure if you are plagiarizing, please ask me. Similarly, if you are unsure how to complete an assignment, come talk to me.
**Course Schedule:** *(Schedule May Be Subject to Changes)*

**Week 1:**
Sept. 4:
--Syllabus, Introduction
Sept. 6:
--What is Political Theatre?
--Turn in Course Interest Sheets
--Start Rereading *Antigone*: Read at least through line 630. As you read, note passages and specific language--words or ideas repeated or debated, for example--that seem especially resonant given the conversations of convocation.
--Group Work: Politics of *Antigone* and Possible Adaptations
--Come to class having thought about two related sets of questions. What makes *Antigone* a form of political theatre? How might you reimagine or stage *Antigone* to highlight some of the political issues raised in the other readings from convocations? What current political conflicts might the play help us to think through? How might you alter the play’s content or form in order to help an audience engage with the particular conflict(s) you are thinking about? To begin thinking creatively about political theatre, we will, as a group, imagine how we might reimagine *Antigone* in order to integrate contemporary political concerns.

**Week 2:** Subjects and the State/ Outsiders and Belonging
Sept 11:
--*Finish Antigone*. As you read, note passages and specific language that seem especially resonant given the conversations we had in our previous class and those of convocation as well. In class we will work on close reading of passages.
--Performance Preferences Due (Please rank all three plays.)
**First Response Paper Due**
Sept. 13:
--*The Merchant of Venice* Acts One and Two and pp. 187-93, 230-5, 241-9, 298-300

**Week 3:** Outsiders and Belonging
Sept. 18:
--*The Merchant of Venice* Acts Three and Four. Read The Introduction
Sept. 20:
--Finish *The Merchant of Venice*

**Week 4:**
Sept. 25: Global Shakespeare
--Taylor, “*Hamlet in Africa 1607*”
**Response Paper 2 Due (Close reading of part of a scene)**
Sept. 27: Alienation Effects
--Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (sections 15-19, 26, 28, 29, 33-59, 67-77)
Week 5: Alienation Effects, Scarce Resources, and Good Citizens
Oct 2:
-- *The Good Person of Szechwan*
Oct 4:
-- *The Good Person of Szechwan*

**October 5: First Paper Due**

**Week 6:** Gender Performance and Resistant Subjects
Oct. 9:
-- Scenes from Lyly, *Gallathea (I.iii; II.i; II.iv; II.v; III.ii; IV.iv)*

**Response Paper 3 Due**
(When this response paper is returned you will receive a cumulate grade for the first three response papers.)
Oct. 11:
-- Augusto Boal, "Poetics of the Oppressed"

**Week 7:**
Oct. 16: FALL BREAK: NO CLASS
Oct. 18:
-- Workshop with Fiasco Theatre

**Week 8:** Resistant Subjects (Continued)
Oct. 25:
-- Boal Exercises: Brainstorming for Image Theatre and Simultaneous Dramaturgy
Oct. 27:
-- Image Theatre and Simultaneous Dramaturgy

**Week 9:** Theatre of the People
OCT. 30:
-- Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, *I will Marry When I Want*, Act 1
Nov. 1:
-- Finish *I will Marry When I Want*

**Response Paper 4 Due**

**Evenings of November 1st or 2nd:** Hwang, *Golden Child*, Signature Theatre Company
Week 10: Cultural and Class Conflict
Nov. 6:
--Discussion of Golden Child
Nov. 8:
--Waiting For Lefty

Antigone at Gallatin, (Nov. 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, and 11 at 7pm)

Week 11: People's Voices: Racial Conflict
Nov. 13:
--Fires in the Mirror, xxiii-lviii and 3-39
Nov. 15:
--Fires in the Mirror
Friday November 18: Second Paper Due

Week 12: Women, Work, and Social Equality
Nov. 20:
--Top Girls
--Response Paper 5 Due
Nov. 22: No class; Holiday

Week 13: Women, Work, and Social Equality/ War and Violence
Nov. 27:
--Top Girls
Nov. 29:
--Blasted

(Mad and Merry Theatre Company, Twelfth Night at The Gene Frankel Theatre November 28th-December 8th)

Week 14: Sexuality and Community
Dec. 4:
--As Is
Dec. 6:
--As Is
--Response Paper 6 Due

Week 15:
Dec. 11: Politics of Musical Theatre
--Final Paper Due
--West Side Story (Film Available at Avery Fisher Center in Bobst Library)
Dec. 13:
--Conclusions