

TRDA 147, T/Th 2:20-3:35 p.m.
Fall 2007
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Office Hours:
T/Th 9:30 a.m. - noon
and any time by appointment
994-6305

DIRECTING FOR THE STAGE

Just tell the story...as believably, as excitingly as possible. Whatever does not tell the story should be subject to a very fishy examination. ...the audience has come to the theatre to believe, to respond to the magical words, "Once upon a time..."

Frank Hauser, Notes on Directing

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we will explore some of the many roles a director plays in the production process and begin to develop some methods for performing those roles with proficiency and passion. We will focus on skills the director needs in order to analyze a play text as a director, conduct pre-production research, develop an overall approach to a play, work with designers and other collaborators, create effective stage pictures, generate meaningful stage movement, work with actors in rehearsal, and sustain the life of a production throughout the rehearsal process. We will practice these methods in and outside of class, both on our feet and on paper. During the preparation of final directing projects, we will also briefly address the special topics of generating original material, understanding particular theatrical styles, and evaluating the work of other directors.

TEXTS

Required:

Bang, Molly. *How Pictures Work*.
Bloom, Michael. *Thinking Like a Director*.
Luce, Clare Booth. *The Women*.

Recommended:

Bartow, Arthur. *The Director's Voice*.
Hauser, Frank. *Notes on Directing*.

EXPECTATIONS

Responsibility to Your Classmates

During this course, you will not only try on the many hats the director wears; you will also be an actor and a performance evaluator. *You should approach these roles with the utmost seriousness.* Because you will want your classmates who serve as your actors to be reliable and work hard, and because you will want them to provide you with thoughtful feedback, you must do the same for them. You will rehearse and prepare all assignments outside of class, often in collaboration with others. If either you or your schedule is inflexible, you should not take this course.

Attendance and Courtesy

Attendance at all class meetings is mandatory. More than one unexcused absence during the semester is grounds for failure; any unexcused absence will hurt your grade. If you anticipate missing a class, you must let me know well in advance.

Common courtesy for me and for your fellow students dictates that you should not come to class late. On many days, substantive work will begin promptly at 2:20. If the door is closed, you have missed the class. If you do need to miss class, you should arrange for another student to take notes for you and fill you in on what happened. Please don't ask me what you missed, or, worse, whether you missed anything important. Finally, there should be absolute silence when anyone in the class is speaking or performing publicly. This means no gum, no page turning, no fidgeting, no sound of any kind. Total attentiveness.

ASSIGNMENTS

Reading

In addition to readings from the three required textbooks, handouts will occasionally be distributed in class.

Assignments for Public Presentation

In the first half of the course we will work together on scenes from a common play text. In addition to the final performance of your directing scene, you will prepare exercises as assigned to show in class; conduct research on the play and present your findings; perform in two classmates' scenes; and conduct one "open rehearsal" of each scene.

In the second half of the course you will work on a play text that you select (in conversation with me). In addition to the final performance of your directing project, you will present your approach to the project in class during the early weeks of rehearsal and make one outside rehearsal open for observation.

Production Books

For each of your two major directing projects, your primary written assignment will be a production book. The production book can be in any format that works for you—written

or typed; collected in a spiral notebook, a sketchbook or a three-ring folder; in chronological order or collage. Consider using the format of the production book to “perform” your vision for the project: how do you want it to feel, or what perspective do you want to maintain while working on it? In any case, as long as it is legible and somehow bound, the format is up to you. Details about the content of the books follow the course calendar.

Additional Writing Assignments

You are required to see this semester’s two departmental theatre productions, the New Play Festival (either A or B), and *Working*. You will be given short “quizzes” in class following the closing of each production. The questions will ask you to think about directorial style and choices. These assignments will count toward your participation grade.

For each of the two scenes in which you participate as an actor, you will be required to provide the director with a one-page assessment of how he / she communicated an approach to the scene and how he / she helped you to play your part in translating that approach into performance.

Finally, in lieu of a final exam, you will be asked to write a 2-3 page assessment of your emerging directorial style. Here, you will assess your particular strengths as a director, as well as your preferences in terms of texts, processes, and production outcomes. You will also articulate a vision of the kind of director you hope to become—that is, what do you most hope to contribute to the theatre?

EVALUATION

General guidelines for determining your grade are as follows:

Preparation and Participation (reading and rehearsing, responding to others’ work): 33%
Written Work: 33%
Scene Presentations: 33%

COURSE CALENDAR
(Revised, 9/13)

Week Beginning	Assignments Due	Class Topics / Activities
9/4	Reading / planning: Converse handout	Introduction Motivating Movement
9/11	Reading: Bloom Intro and Ch.1	Motivating Movement Motivating Movement
9/18	Reading: Luce, Bloom Ch.2, Ahart handouts (concept, action)	Research Action, Structure, Metaphor
9/25	Reading: Bang Writing: Compiled Research Packets	How Pictures Work Basic Approach Presentations
10/2	Reading: Bloom Ch. 9 Final Project Conferences Complete	Table Work 1-4 Table Work 5-8
10/9	Reading: Bloom Ch.10-12 Due (Th.): Final Project Approval	Rehearsal Techniques Rehearsal Techniques
10/16	Reading: Bloom Ch. 13	Scene Open Rehearsals 1-4 Scene Open Rehearsals 5-8
10/23	Writing: Production Books Reading: Bloom Ch. 8	Open Rehearsal Evaluations Running Auditions
10/30	CAST FINAL PROJECTS THIS WEEK	Approach Presentations Approach Presentations
11/6	Reading: Bloom, Ch. 6	Working with Collaborators Creating your own Material
11/13	Reading: Bloom Ch. 7, Ahart handout (style)	Directing and Politics Style: Wilde, Beckett, Durang
11/20		Style: Non-Western Drama
11/27	11/29: FINAL PROJECTS PERFORMED Beginning at 7:00 p.m.	Evaluating Performances Troubleshooting
12/4	Writing: Production Books	Evaluating Projects 1-4 Evaluating Projects 5-8

Please Note:

1. Some brief additional readings may be assigned.
2. Unless otherwise noticed, readings should be completed by the beginning of the week in which they are due.
3. Your “open rehearsal” must not be your first rehearsal.

Prompt Book Guidelines

The contents of the production book must include (though need not be limited to):

1. **A brief written response to your initial reading of the play.** This can be in note rather than essay form. Things to note might include, what strikes you as important? What strikes you as attractive? What do you need to better understand?
2. **Challenges and Goals.** What are the big challenges of this particular scene for you? What are your goals in terms of your development as a director?
3. **Research on the play** in three areas: historical / political, social / cultural, and production / author history. We will talk more about these in class.
4. **A sensory fantasia.** This part of the work is about non-rational responses. You should go where your imagination takes you, but some things to think about if you are stuck include: What colors do you see in the set and costume design? What kind of music / rhythms do you hear? What parts of the play are light or dark? Is there an artist whose work seems to resonate with the play? What images might be fruitful for you to look at, even if they don't end up in the performance? What metaphors does the play suggest to you? You can include sketches (stick figures are okay!), pictures from magazines, reproductions of paintings, etc.
5. **Notes on all subsequent readings** of the play, including the focus of the reading. You should do at least one reading with each of the two central characters in mind.
6. **The approach.** In as concise a manner as possible, say what the play is about and describe your primary touchstone in communicating that approach on stage. In doing this for two productions, you will begin to develop your own "approach to the approach," drawing on but in no way limited by the two models shared in class.
7. **A structural analysis of the text.** We will talk more about this in class.
8. **A ground plan / preliminary staging ideas.** How, in a basic way, will the space be set up, and where will key exchanges happen? This should be visually represented in your prompt book.
9. **Rehearsal plans.** How many rehearsals will you have and how do you intend to use them?
10. **Rehearsal notes.** What was the most important moment in today's rehearsal and why? Was there a discovery? A roadblock? An achievement?
11. **An evaluation** of the project based on your directing goals.

If this sounds like a lot of work, it is. If it sounds like a lot of pages, it needn't be. With the exception of #3, which will probably require more, most of these elements can be addressed in a page or less.

Final Project Selection Guidelines

1. Approval: I must approve your final project selection by October 11. That means that you should bring your project proposal to me no later than October 2 so that, if it is not approved, you have time to make a new selection. When you bring the project to me, you should be able to give me a copy of the script and explain why, as a director, you want to work on this text. Reasons for rejecting the project proposal might include:
 - The project is too simple or too difficult for your skill level
 - The project is too long
 - The project requires too many actors or too many design elements
 - For other reasons, the project is not conducive to working on basic directing skills
2. Time Limit: 15 to 17 minutes. This restriction is based on two factors: the amount of time you have to effectively rehearse and the performance time available to the class as a whole. I will adhere strictly to this time limit (I will time the videotape). Exceeding the limit will result in a grade reduction.
3. Number of Characters: TWO. This restriction is for your benefit, both substantively and logistically.
4. Style: Contemporary realism. The purpose of this guideline is to avoid the special challenges of particular historical periods and styles, which are not a primary subject of the course. I may waive this requirement, but only if there are good reasons to do so in terms of your skill level.