

TH 190 The Threepenny Opera: A New Musical Theatre

Seminar Leader: Julia Hart
Course Times: Thursdays 3:45-7:00pm
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Office Hours: Thursdays 2:30-3:30pm

Course Description

Today *The Threepenny Opera* remains one of the world's most performed musical dramas. This seminar will take an in-depth look into the creation, the dramatic structure, the music, and the staging of *The Threepenny Opera* in readings, discussions, and rehearsals. Why has the *The Threepenny Opera* been so successful and how can *The Threepenny Opera* be staged today? This practicing arts theatre course is going to discuss the collaboration of Bertolt Brecht, Elisabeth Hauptmann, and Kurt Weill and study the original production at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in 1928. This course will also visit the Brecht archives to study original production photos. We will attend a performance of Robert Wilson's *Threepenny Opera*.

This seminar will introduce students to Brecht's theoretical texts on the epic theatre such as *A Short Organum for the Theater* and *The Street Scene*. Students will not only analyse epic theatre techniques, but will try to use Brecht's specific acting and directing exercises and devices in rehearsal. Musicologist and vocalist Meredith Nicoll will visit this course throughout the semester to discuss the music of Kurt Weill and rehearse selected songs from *The Threepenny Opera* with students. Students will act, sing, direct, and study scenes from *The Threepenny Opera* which will be presented at the end of the semester.

Requirements

Students are expected to:

- Turn off phones during the entire class time, including off-campus trips. They will be allowed to be used only during breaks.
- Be prepared to present artworks / assignments / presentations without reminder.
- Engage in critiques and discussions.
- Initiate appointments with Professor or arts staff outside of class time when assistance is necessary.
- Always allocate extra time for work preparation and clean-up for independent production.

- Respond to emails from Professor in a timely manner Inform Professor at beginning of semester if photos of student, artwork, works in progress are NOT to be taken and / or used for Bard College Berlin.
- Remove all artworks, art materials, and any personal belongings before the final inspection of the arts spaces during completion week. Failure to remove works and / or clean spaces used will result in final grade penalization. Donating artworks or art materials (unrequested) at anytime is not permitted and will still be considered student's property that will be expected to be removed.

Attendance

- Attendance of ALL classes is expected.
- More than one absence (that is, absence from one three-hour session per week) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course.
- Students are expected to attend all off-campus classes punctually, from start to finish. If there is a scheduling / travel conflict, Professor must be informed in advance.
- Tardiness after five minutes will be considered an absence.

Scene Study Requirements:

- choose one scene from the play assigned that you would like to explore and conceptualize, devise, and rehearse as an actor or director.
- one additional 2-3 hour rehearsal per scene to be completed outside of class each week
- Scene Study One from *The Threepenny Opera* will be discussed and critiqued on 26.3.2020
- Scene Study Two from *The Threepenny Opera* will be discussed and critiqued on 30.4.2020)

Scene Study Assessment

- Students will be graded on their preparation, completion of rehearsal reports (sent via email, 1-2 paragraphs in length), and the ability to discuss their ideas about the situation and characters in the scene. Actors will be assessed on their preparation, physicality, use of movement/gesture, delivery of lines, and a clear approach to their characters. Directors will be assessed on their preparation, use of space, movement/gesture, and clear intention of what is being explored in the scene.

Written requirements:

Scene Study Essays (2000 words due 2.4.2020 and 11.5.2020)

Scene Study Essay should contain the following:

- Rehearsal process: how the scene was chosen, a brief analysis of the scene (the situation, the Brechtian "gestus", the characters, the central conflict), descriptions from rehearsal, including what rehearsal (as actors or directors) methods and exercises related to the epic theater were implemented, how they were implemented, and any relevant challenges and observations from rehearsals
- Evaluation of the scene presentation and a critical evaluation of the rehearsal process.

Grade Breakdown: Scene Study 40%
Written Assignments 30%
Class Participation 30%.

Policy on Late Submission

Assignments (artworks, essays, performances, oral presentations) that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (Example: B+ becomes C+). Professor is not obliged to accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late. Where Professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

*Course readings can be found in the electronic course reader. Three copies of *The Threepenny Opera* are on reserve in the library.

Schedule

- 30.1 **Who was Bertolt Brecht? What is epic theater? What is *The Threepenny Opera*?**
Introduction to the life and work of Bertolt Brecht
Introduction to the epic theater and *The Threepenny Opera*
- 6.2 **Epic Theater, Acting, Alienation Technique and Gestus**
Required Reading:
Fifty Key Theatre Directors: 52-56
Actors on Acting: 307-311, 312-16
Brecht Sourcebook: 23-26
A Short Organum for the Theater in *Brecht on Theatre*: 179-205
Guide to the Plays of Bertolt Brecht 57-64
The Street Scene in *Brecht on Theatre*: 121-29,
Brecht on Theatre: 136-140, 236-39
Cambridge Companion: 219-23, 278-81 (211-19 is optional)
Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations. What is Epic Theater? 147-54
optional: *Brecht Sourcebook*: 43-48 (Gestus and the influence of
American actors)
- **Mandatory Factory Orientation will take place during class. Please bring your laptops.*
- 13.2 **An Introduction to the music of Kurt Weill, Jazz and the Berlin Cabaret Scene. Singing Gestus. (With Meredith Nicoll)**
Required Reading and required listening: to be announced.
- 20.2 **Direction, Dramaturgy, Rehearsal Process and Stage Design**
Required Reading:

Cambridge Companion to Brecht: 180,193-99 (Invention of the Dramaturg), 259-78,
Brecht on Theatre: 230-33, 239-46
Guide to the Plays of Bertolt Brecht 64-75

27.2 **The Threepenny Opera**

Required Reading: *The Threepenny Opera*
A Guide to the Plays of Bertolt Brecht: 207-215
Cambridge Companion: 132-43.

5.3 **Collaborating to Create The Threepenny Opera: Brecht's work with Kurt Weill, Elisabeth Hauptmann, Lotte Lenya and Helene Weigel**
(With Meredith Nicoll)

Required Reading: *The Partnership: Brecht, Weill, Three Women and Germany on the Brink* by Pamela Katz

12.3 Review of Epic Theatre Tools and Terms
Workshop in rehearsal methods, character development, and conceptual groundwork

*form Scene Study groups
Assignment: one rehearsal outside of class

19.3 Scene Study 1 Rehearsals

26.3 Scene Study 1 Rehearsals

2.4 Scene Study 1 Presentations

9.4 Spring Break

16.4 Singing workshop with Meredith Nicoll
*Form groups for Scene Study Two
Assignment: one rehearsal outside of class
*Scene Study essay due

23.4 Scene Study Two Rehearsals

30.4 Scene Study Two Rehearsals

7.5 Last Day of Class. Scene Study Two Presentations. Rehearsals and evaluation for public scene presentation.

BRECHT NIGHT. Show at 7pm
*Scene Study Essay due 11.5.2020

*Factory inspection at 9pm following the strike and clean-up of all set pieces, props, costumes, and tech equipment. Failure to strike and clear materials from the Factory after the show will result in grade

reduction

Facility Policies:

“The Factory” – Eichenstrasse 43

- 1) The BCB “Factory” (main arts building) has space and facilities available to BCB students with an academic purpose for using the building. Any space in the building, private or shared, cannot be used unless permission has been granted. Any questions relating to this must be addressed to the Director of Studios Arts.
- 2) Chip access to the building will only be granted to those students currently registered for classes using the factory (after add-drop), and that have been offered orientation.
- 3) No smoking is allowed anywhere inside the building. There are to be no projects using open flames (such as candles, torches, lanterns, fireworks, etc.) inside any part of the building.
- 4) Fire exits and lanes (black-taped areas) must be kept clear of any obstructions.
- 5) No spray-painting inside of the building. This also includes any strong, odorous materials (with or without spray). All production involving odorous material is to be done outside the building.
- 6) All work surfaces (table and floor) must always be protected with thick plastic or cardboard. If production is to happen outside, ground / concrete is also to be protected.
- 7) Food must be always cleaned up and removed immediately. Any food used for an art project requiring refrigeration must be labeled with one’s name, and disposed of after presentation. All food must be disposed of in lidded trash cans.
- 8) All students are to always be respectful of other student artworks and personal property.
- 9) No art projects may function as weapons, or potentially cause bodily harm.
- 10) No sandals, flip-flops, or bare feet will be allowed inside or around the workshop areas, which includes walking through the workshop. This includes dance and theater students as well.
- 11) Students should always wear adequate protection (goggles, gloves, dust masks, etc.) when needed. BCB will always try to provide these items.
- 12) If you are uncertain how to use a tool or piece of equipment or require assistance, please ask for assistance (by appointment, if necessary).
- 13) Students must be aware of who else is working in the building after dark. Any curfews established by Bard College Berlin must be respected. Finishing production and cleaning up must happen before the curfew time.
- 14) Students must make sure all lights are turned off and doors are closed when leaving the building. No windows or doors are to be left opened or cracked. All electrical items must be unplugged when not in use.
- 15) Any unidentified property left in any common space is subject to either be taken or thrown out, without restitution. All private property **MUST** be labeled and stored in its proper location.
- 16) All workshop items must be returned to the workshop when not in use.
- 17) Any items leaving the building without permission will be considered stolen, and access to the factory may be suspended for the rest of the semester. If an item must be borrowed for a purpose outside of the building, contact the arts staff, and be prepared to leave your Student ID as a deposit. Fines may be charged for late return.

- 18) All students must respect signage posted in the factory that may involve rules that are not mentioned in this document. This includes signage indicating reserved spaces where communal use is restricted.
 - 19) There are to be no architectural changes to studios or any areas inside or outside of the building without first speaking with your Professor, Studio Arts Manager, or Director of Studio Arts. When repainting any walls that need restoration, please consult with arts staff beforehand.
 - 20) During completion week, any space used by a student must be returned empty with clean walls and floors. All garbage must be bagged (or boxed) and properly disposed of. All students must accept the penalty of grades being affected and / or fines imposed if items are left (or renovations unfinished) by the inspection deadline.
1. Contact Studio Arts Manager Joon Park with any questions: j.park@berlin.bard.edu

AV Facilities – Eichenstrasse 43 (upstairs)

- 1) BCB's AV (Audio / Visual) facilities provide a limited quantity of AV equipment to support Admin, Faculty as well as those students enrolled in arts classes that require specific items. AV facilities do not include any black and white or color printing services for students.
- 2) The opening times may change every semester to adapt to specific course times. Once these times are established they will stay consistent throughout the semester, with possible exceptions. AV facilities are ONLY available during days when classes are held (closed during official BCB holidays).
- 3) All items checked out are due back during AV hours the following day, unless other arrangements have been made in advance directly with AV staff.
- 4) Items to be reserved on a specific date should be requested at least one week in advance. Without reservation, availability is limited to a first-come, first-serve basis.
- 5) The AV staff may exclude students from borrowing items at any time, if the student:
 - failed to return items in time
 - failed to return items in person (pick up and/ or return by friends is not allowed)
 - returned items with missing pieces
 - returned items damaged or in poor shape
- 6) AV equipment will be given out only to those students responsible in organizing, picking up as well as returning their items IN PERSON. No exceptions.
- 7) All items returned late, regardless of patron's position at BCB, will be subject to a 1 Euro fine, per day.
- 8) Any item returned without accessories (such as cables, SD card, batteries, tripod head, lens cap, etc) will be subject to a 1 Euro fine, per day (the same as late returns).
- 9) Any items missing will be subject to patron reimbursement for its value (or under special circumstances, replacement, at the discretion of AV staff).
- 10) Any items damaged or malfunctioning are expected to be reported to staff upon check-in.
- 10) Please use the AV email to inquire about equipment or policy, as well as to reserve (av@berlin.bard.edu). Do not contact AV staff through their personal emails.

- 11) We strongly suggest personally visiting the facilities to inquire and reserve before borrowing equipment!
- 12) AV equipment is limited at BCB. Whenever possible students are encouraged to use their own devices (computers, cameras) for production purposes.
- 13) Contact AV staff with any questions: av@berlin.bard.edu
- 14) MacLab and Photo Darkroom Facilities – Platanenstrasse 98 (downstairs)