

TH 133 Elfriede Jelinek: A Study of Postdramatic Playwriting, Directing, and Acting

Seminar Leader: Julia Hart

Course Times: Thursdays 3:45-7pm

Email: j.hart@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: Thursdays 2:30-3:30pm (by appointment only)

Course Description

No female playwright has so strongly influenced the contemporary theatre in Germany as the Austrian Nobel Laureate Elfriede Jelinek. In the fall of 2017, she was awarded the prestigious Faust prize for her relentless, searing observations and analysis of social phenomena. She focuses on three targets in her playwriting: capitalist consumer society, the remnants of Austria's fascist past in public and private life, and the systematic exploitation and oppression of women in a capitalist-patriarchal society. Her work is highly controversial.

How has Elfriede Jelinek's writing affected theatre-making in Germany? How can her writing be considered postdramatic? Theatre scholar Karen Jürs-Mundby writes that Jelinek and other postdramatic playwrights "produce what could be called 'open' or 'writely' texts for performance, in the sense that they require the spectators to become active co-writers of the performance text. The spectators are no longer just filling in the predictable gaps in a dramatic narrative but are asked to become active witnesses who reflect on their own meaning-making." Language is not necessarily the speech of characters- if there are definable characters at all! In this seminar, we will read, discuss, and rehearse scenes from the most recent plays of Elfriede Jelinek available in English translation as directors, actors, and dramaturges. This course will explore concrete methods of directing and acting when working with postdramatic theatre texts. We will also attend performances of Jelinek's plays and other postdramatic performances at theaters in Berlin.

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 (Final Project) Requirements: 7.5.2026

- choose one scene from one of the plays discussed that you would like to explore and conceptualise, devise, and rehearse as an actor or director.
- One additional three hour rehearsal per week to be completed outside of class
- Scene Study will be discussed and critiqued on
- Additional assignments to prepare the Scene Study will be posted on Google Classroom

Scene Study Assessment

- Students will be graded on their preparation, completion of rehearsal reports (upload on Google Classroom, 1-2 paragraphs in length), and the ability to discuss their ideas about the situation on stage, the characters or performer's roles in the scene, and how the scene work is experimenting with elements of the postdramatic theater and the role of language in the performance. Actors will be assessed on their physicality, use of movement/gesture, delivery of lines, and a clear approach to their performance. Directors will be assessed on their use of space, movement/gesture, and clear intention of what is being explored in the scene.

The participation grade will be based on students' participation in class discussions. The following exercises will also be part of the participation grade for this course:

Monologue Assignment: 21.3.2026

- Students will choose a short monologue from one of the plays recently discussed to memorize and present in class.

Performance Exercise: 26.2.2026

- Students will develop a short experimental scene in class using one of Elfriede Jelinek's *Princess Plays*. This performance exercise will be worked on in class, yet also prepared outside of class.

Written requirements:

Scene Study Essay (2000 words due 15.05.2026)

Scene Study Essay should contain the following:

- Rehearsal process: how the scene was chosen, a brief analysis of the scene (the situation, the language, the characters, the central conflict (if there is one), including what elements of the postdramatic were explored. What changes, additions, cuts, and did you and your team try out with Jelinek's text? Include descriptions from rehearsal, including what rehearsal (as actors or directors) methods and exercises were implemented, how they were implemented, and any relevant challenges and observations from rehearsals
- Evaluation of the scene presentation and how it was received by the audience. What changed in performance?

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 will be posted on Google Classroom or on reserve in the BCB library. The following plays will be posted on Google Classroom: *The Princess Plays* and *On Royal Road*.

Recommended Books to Purchase: Elfriede Jelinek's plays *CHARGES*, *The Merchant's Contracts and Fury*. There are several copies of these plays in the BCB library, but it might be convenient to have a personal copy.

Schedule

29.1 Introduction to Elfriede Jelinek and the Postdramatic Theatre
Overview of Jelinek's biography, plays, and introduction to key concepts of Postdramatic theatre

**THEATER VISIT. We will see Sarah Kane's play GIER at the Deutsches Theater at 8pm. Class will therefore end at 6pm so you have time to get dinner and travel to the theatre.

5.2 Setting the Scene: A deeper look into the Postdramatic Theatre
Reading: *The Art of Assembly: Political Theatre Today* 9-45
Postdramatic Theatre 16-33, 82-132
Discussion of GIER in the context of post dramatic aesthetics.

12.2 Princess Plays. Elfriede Jelinek and the Nobel Peace Prize.
Reading: *A Tribute to Elfriede Jelinek* 43-44
How to Get the Nobel Peace Prize Without Really Trying (1-16)
Elfriede Jelinek Nobel Prize 2004 2-4
Sleeping Beauty
Snow White Play
Jackie
A Fairy Tale Reality? Elfriede Jelinek's Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and the Mytholization of Contemporary Society 1-20
Optional Reading: *I am a Trümmerfrau of Language. Interview with Elfriede Jelinek* 1-18
Princess Plays — Performance Exercise conceptual preparation

19.2 Workshop rehearsal methods
Staging monologues and scenes from Princess Plays
Assignment: memorise lines, prepare concept and rehearsal plan
Princess Plays Table Rehearsals / Improvisation

26.2 Princess Plays Exercise Rehearsal and Presentations
Assignment: one rehearsal outside of class, rehearsal report

5.3 NO CLASS -Assignment Read both *The Merchant's Contract* and *the Charges* between 26.2 and 19.3 , and prepare your monologue for 21.3
**See Google Classroom for brief writing assignment on your impressions and initial reactions to reading each play

12.3 NO CLASS: -Assignment Read both *The Merchant's Contract* and *the Charges* between 26.2 and 19.3 , and prepare your monologue for 21.3
**See Google Classroom for brief writing assignment on your impressions and initial reactions to reading each play

19.3 The Merchant's Contracts
 Reading: Introduction by Gita Honegger 20-62
The Merchant's Contracts: A Comedy of Economics 175-277
 Optional Reading:
Appendix A Bad Rap Now What? 278-293
Appendix B You Bet! A Sequel 294-326

20.3 Weekend Block. Saturday 20.3 12-3pm

Charges (The Supplicants)
 Reading: *Charges* review in World Literature Review 86-87
 Translator's Preface vii-xiv
Charges (The Supplicants) 1-83
Review of postdramatic theater concepts

21.3 Weekend Block, Sunday 21.3 12-3pm

*Monologue Exercise from *Charges* or *The Merchant's Contracts*

26.3 On the Royal Road
 Reading: *On the Royal Road* (1-29)
The Terror of the Cute. Elfriede Jelinek in Conversation with Gita Honegger 37-44

*Final Project Groups Formed

2.4 SPRING BREAK

9.4 Scene Study Rehearsal WORKSHOP - focus on movement, choreography, gesture, staging images
 Assignments: rehearsal report
 One three hour rehearsal outside of class

16.4 Scene Study Rehearsal and workshop of rehearsed material
 Assignments: rehearsal report
 One three hour rehearsal outside of class

23.4 Scene Study Rehearsal
 Scene Study Rehearsal and workshop of rehearsed material
 Assignments: rehearsal report
 One three hour rehearsal outside of class

*ALL LINES MUST BE MEMORISED BY THIS TIME

25.4/26.4 Sunday 12-4pm Scene Study Rehearsals
 Assignments: See Google Classroom
 One three hour rehearsal outside of class

30.4 Rehearsal during class time (without Julia)

7.5 Scene Study Dress Rehearsal and Presentations
 Assignments: See Google Classroom

One three hour rehearsal outside of class

PERFORMANCE FACTORY

15.5 Scene Study Reflection Essay Due



Facility Guidelines:

“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. Students agree to only use the common spaces in the building that are available for their needs, and must respect private spaces that are off-limits.
- 2) Chip access to The Factory building and other arts facilities is limited to those students currently registered for classes needing those facilities. Orientations are required before access is granted. In addition, students and faculty involved in clubs as well as event hosting may receive chip access and permission to use The Factory after orientations have been arranged through the Studio Arts Manager.
- 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 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 of the building.
- 6) All work surfaces (table and floor) must be properly protected with thick plastic or cardboard. If production is to happen outside, ground / concrete is also to be protected.
- 7) No oil painting is allowed on the property unless student is enrolled in a BCB painting course, or approved in advance by the Studio Arts Manager
- 8) Food must be always cleaned up and removed immediately.. All food must be disposed of in lidded trash cans.
- 9) All students are to always be respectful of other student artworks and personal property.
- 10) No art projects may function as weapons, or potentially cause bodily harm.
- 11) 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.
- 12) Students should always wear adequate protection (goggles, gloves, dust masks, etc.) when needed. Protective gear can be found in the Factory workshop.
- 13) If you are uncertain how to use a tool or piece of equipment or require assistance, please ask Studio Arts Manager for assistance (by appointment).
- 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.

16)

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 the Studio Arts Manager. When repainting any walls that need restoration, please consult with Studio Arts Manager 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.

21) Contact Studio Arts Manager Joon Park directly 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).
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 directly with any questions: av@berlin.bard.edu

Bard College Berlin
A LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

MacLab and Photo Darkroom Facilities – Platanenstrasse 98 (downstairs)

** Guidelines to be offered during orientations.