

## GHOSTS IN THE THEATRICAL MACHINE: SPECTRES OF MODERNITY

### COURSE OUTLINE

One of the contradictions of the theatre, as Andrew Sofer has argued, is that it “traffics in corporeal stuff (bodies, fluids, gases, objects)” even while it “incorporates the incorporeal.” Invisible presences in the theatre “matter very much indeed, even if spectators, characters, and performers cannot put their hands on them.” In this course, we will examine theatrical representations of invisible presences – of what is “‘not there,’ yet ‘not not there’” – in order to explore the ways in which Western modernity traffics in the corporeal stuff of raced, gendered, and commodified bodies. In doing so, we will work to put our hands on three spectres of the global modernist world – capitalism, colonialism, and multiculturalism.

This seminar examines several critiques of these spectres of Western modernity from a globally diverse range of playwrights and critical theorists. While this course examines the political and economic systems of modernity from a theatre and performance studies perspective, it primarily aims to equip students with fundamental interdisciplinary skills in the humanities and social sciences, such as rhetorical and interpretive analysis, critical thinking, and effective oral and written argumentation.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this course, you will critically examine globally diverse interdisciplinary critiques of Western modernity, as well as engage in the critical practices of both theatre and performance analysis and histories of political thought, in order to:

1. define and understand how devices, techniques, and concepts relevant to theatre and performance analysis function, and carry out close analyses of structural and argumentative components in both dramatic and critical texts.
2. examine how playwrights and theatre practitioners comprehend and critique the world around them, and be able to identify and evaluate the social, cultural, political and formal aesthetic factors which have shaped creative processes in the modern theatre and have been used to produce a theatrical experience that makes an impact on the world.
3. read, discuss, respond, and analyse the rhetorical moves that critical thinkers use in order to make arguments, and learn how to produce your own complex and well-supported arguments that reflect the conventions and audience expectations of research in the humanities and social sciences

### ASSESSMENT

#### *Attendance and Participation (15%)*

Your participation grade will be evaluated based on your degree of attendance (attendance will be taken), class preparation, completion of all exercises, and active participation in large and small group discussions. You must also meet the following stipulations regarding participation and attendance:

- **Respect for Diversity:** It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students’ learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource,

- strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture.
- The topics that we're covering in this class are often difficult, not just intellectually but emotionally. While I expect there to be rigorous discussion and even disagreement in the course of our class discussions, you must engage in discussion with care and empathy for the other members in the classroom. Aim to disagree without becoming disagreeable.
  - your participation will be evaluated based on your degree of engagement with the class. By "engagement" I mean the effort you put into listening, processing, and responding to others in a conscientious and constructive way
  - you must also meet with me for a one-on-one meeting, at least twice in the semester, to discuss your written work (this may include discussing an essay idea with me prior to completing an assignment or discussing ways to improve your written work after receiving essay feedback from me)

#### *Reading Responses (20%)*

You are expected to write ten 1-2 page response papers, each worth 2% of your grade. In the first response of the semester, you will describe and reflect on a "performative" moment in your life (this can include, but is not limited to, an attendance at or participation in a formal theatrical production, involvement in a religious or cultural act, or an attendance of how you "perform" in your everyday life). In the nine subsequent responses, you will identify a moment in the play under discussion for that week which might, in performance, demonstrate the "dark matter" of the theatre (i.e. "the invisible dimension of theatre that escapes visual detection, even though its effects are felt everywhere in performance"), and you will discuss how that moment can fruitfully shed light on one of the arguments made in that week's critical text.

#### *Short Analytical Essay (25%)*

You will be provided with 3-4 questions, and you will choose ONE question and write a 4-5 page essay at the end of week 7 that addresses one issue highlighted by our critical texts (and discussed in class) as it applies to one or more of the plays we have read thus far (Kan'ami's *Matsukaze*, Yeats's *The Dreaming of the Bones*, and/or Scott's *An Echo in the Bone*). In addition to identifying dramatic elements and discussing the relationship between these elements and the content of the play, you will make an argument about how these playwrights utilize material and corporeal elements of the theatre in order to represent and critique the immaterial forces (e.g. values, ideologies, and epistemologies) of colonialism.

#### *Research Paper, including Proposal (10%), Final Paper (25%), and Class Presentation (5%)*

You will write an 8-10 page final seminar paper as a culmination of your engagement with the spectres of modernity as they are represented, grappled with, and critiqued in the dramatic texts we have read. For this paper, you are encouraged to develop your own topic based on the readings or an idea sparked by reading responses and/or your short analytical essay. The goal of this final paper is to demonstrate a deep engagement with the theme of course – the spectres of modernity – by engaging more deeply with two or more playwrights on the syllabus. You will be expected to perform sophisticated interpretive analysis that is informed by secondary research on your topic in order to offer a nuanced, complex, and insightful position on the course material. You will be required to submit a short proposal of your argument and a bibliography which you will workshop in class; a final

version of your proposal and bibliography which will count toward 10% of your final grade; a draft of your final essay which will be provisionally graded and for which I will provide written feedback, before you revise and resubmit for 25% of your grade; and a short (5-8 min) presentation in class which will count toward 5% of your grade. Your presentation may take the form of a formal “mini conference” paper presentation or a creative rendition of your argument (i.e. a short staging of a scene; a description and justification of how you would stage one of a scene from one of the plays; a presentation and justification of how you would design the sets for one of the plays, etc.) If taking the creative option, you must run your idea past me for approval prior to the presentation.

## TEXTS

### *Theory/Critical Works*

Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (selected chapters)  
 Andrew Sofer, Introduction to *Dark Matter: Invisibility in Drama, Theatre, and Performance*  
 Gilbert Ryle, “Descartes’ Myth,” in *The Concept of Mind*  
 Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (selected chapters)  
 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (selected chapters)  
 Weber, “The Spirit of Capitalism,” in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*  
 Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition”  
 Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition* (selected chapters)

### *Plays*

Kan’ami (revised by Zeami), *Matsukaze* (short play, Japan)  
 W.B. Yeats, *The Dreaming of the Bones* (short play, Ireland)  
 Dennis Scott, *An Echo in the Bone* (full length, Jamaica)  
 David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly* (full length, USA)  
 Charlie Chaplin, *Modern Times* (film, USA)  
 Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children* (full length, Germany)  
 Apirana Taylor, *Whaea Kairau: Mother Hundred Eater* (full length, New Zealand)  
 Lynn Nottage, *Sweat* (full length, USA)  
 John Romeril, *Miss Tanaka* (full length, Australia)