



TH350 EUROPEAN APPROACHES TO TEXT AND THEATRE PERFORMANCE

IES Abroad London

DESCRIPTION:

The twentieth century can be defined in European theatrical terms as the period that engendered concrete methodologies to performance. Previously, there is little evidence of there being any sort of structured approach to 'acting'. The Moscow Arts 'System' of the late 19th century, pioneered by Konstantin Stanislavsky, was the starting point for said methodologies, prompting alternative theories and methodologies of performance from practitioners such as Bertolt Brecht, Michael Chekhov and Rudolf Laban. This course is a taste of some of these methodologies, investigated, for the most part, practically, as performance, in a workshop environment.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: This course is for students who have performed at any previous level, although participants do not need to be Theatre or Performance majors. There will not be time in class devoted to dis-inhibiting the student. S/he should be comfortable putting a script on its feet, trying things, failing, trying again, and making choices as a performer; and making constructive observations as a member of the 'class/audience'.

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

This course takes place in a rehearsal room, not a classroom. We will focus primarily on the work of Stanislavsky and, secondarily, on the work of Bertolt Brecht. We will use texts that are best suited to each method: *The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov (regarding Stanislavsky's methods) and *Mother Courage & Her Children* in the case of Bertolt Brecht. We will also link the performance practices studied to the performances that we view each week. Students will be given specific reading each week to prepare them for the following week's exploration, and additional research may be required. Students may also need to rehearse scenes between classes.

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- **Class Participation (30%):** Active engagement in class activities. Contribution to group discussions. Supportive listening towards other students and attentive observation.
- **Mid-Term Paper (20%):** A 1000-word reflective essay on the work undertaken during the first half of the term.
- **Scene Study Preparation (20%):** Thorough preparation for scene study work including detailed reading of the text, creative use of costumes and props, responsive engagement with scene study partners.
- **Final Performance Exam (30%):** Delivery of a clearly considered performance piece with verbal articulation of performance intentions. Note: the exam will not assess the 'quality' of performance, but rather the clarity of intention behind it and the evidence of thoughtful work.
Working in pairs, students will be given two scenes from two separate stage plays at the midterm period in preparation for the exam which will take the form of practical scene presentations.
Students will present their scenes to an external examiner. They will then respond to a series of questions posed by the examiner about their approach, or interpretation. This will essentially form a discussion between students and the external examiner (who will be a reputable actor or director). Students will also need to demonstrate that they have understood and interpreted the play in its entirety. The external examiner will then spend a short period of up to twenty minutes working on the scene with students to seek new developments in the work. Note: the performance exam will not assess the 'quality' of individual students' performances. Rather, they will be assessed on the clarity of their ideas and evidence of thorough preparation of the scene studies.



LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- The course will equip participants with the dramaturgical language to practice the methods studied, as a performer, or to extent appreciation of textual analysis as a non-performer. It will also give the students the ability to deconstruct a dramatic text and go some way in helping to deconstruct a dramatic performance; be that on stage, or on the screen

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Regular class attendance is mandatory. Irregular attendance may result in a lower grade in the course, and/or disciplinary action. The IES Abroad London class attendance policy does not allow for unexcused absences, and grades will be docked one-half letter grade for each such absence. Rare exceptions will be made for the following reasons:

- The student is too sick to attend class. In this instance, the student must call the IES Abroad Centre before class to notify any of the IES Abroad staff. It is not sufficient either to email, send a message with a friend or call the Centre after the class has started.
- A serious illness or death in the immediate family requiring a student to travel home. This requires written approval from the Centre Director before departure.

Arriving more than 10 minutes late to class may count as an unexcused absence. Immigration laws in the UK are extremely strict, and we jeopardize our legal status in hosting students who do not regularly attend class. Students who do not attend class regularly will be reported to the appropriate officials and risk dismissal from the program and deportation from the UK. If a student incurs absences representing 25% of the total class hours, they will be contacted by the Academic Programme Manager (APM) and Centre Director (CD). If these absences are made up exclusively of unexcused non-attendance, this will trigger a disciplinary review. If these absences are made up of excused non-attendance, a meeting will be held to discuss the underlying reasons for lack of attendance, and to discuss ways it can be maintained for the duration of the term. If the 25% threshold is reached due to a mixture of excused and unexcused absences, students will also be asked to attend a meeting to discuss.

CONTENT:

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 1	Course Introduction and Introduction to The Scenic Event • An overview of course content Introduction to the Stanislavskian idea of The Event and the roles of Concentration and Relaxation	• Reading Assignment: The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov
Week 2	Given Circumstances and the Event Part 1. • An introduction to Stanislavsky's process of text analysis, whereby students can gain insight into the contextual details of a text in preparation for performance. We will begin to work through the first act of the Cherry Orchard as a Scenic Analysis.	• Reading assignment: Katie Mitchel's The Directors Handbook • Reading assignment Active Analysis by Maria Knebel in Stanislavsky's Active Analysis by James Thomas

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 3	Given Circumstances and the Event Part 2 Continuing the work from the previous week we will complete our analysis of Act 1 of The Cherry Orchard.	- Assignment: create lists of facts and questions for remaining acts of Cherry Orchard, leading to key character biographies and timeline. - Prepare character improvisation improvisation
Week 4	Improvisation 1: Applying Circumstances as Character Students will present solo and/or paired improvisations around characters in The Cherry Orchard, meeting those characters as themselves, through the lens of character's circumstances	- Reading assignments: Uta Hagen's Respect For Acting and/or Nikolai Demidov's Becoming An Actor Creator - Prepare second improvisation, based on a scene in the Cherry Orchard
Week 5	Improvisation 2: Using Etudes as a Means Of Exploring scenes. Students will undertake structured improvisations, based on scenes that they have prepared, exploring how they can combine impulse, responses to their scene partners and the structure of a scripted work.	None
Week 6	Psychological Gesture/Laban/Meyerhold (with Guest Teacher) A guest Acting Teacher will introduce students to some of the physical principles of Michael Chekhov, Laban, and Meyerhold, as a means through which actors can use physical action to amplify inner emotional states.	Mid-Term Break: Students will be given the assignment of writing a short reflective paper on their experience of working with the methods of Stanislavsky.
Week 7	Brechtian Realism and understanding Brecht's historical context We will engage with on the work of Bertolt Brecht, looking at the dramatic world of <i>Mother Courage & Her Children</i> as a social system and historical commentary.	Reading Assignment: <i>Mother Courage & Her Children</i>

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 8	Brechtian Scenic Analysis 1. This session will be a textual analysis of <i>Mother Courage</i>, looking at moments where the socio-historical Epic Theatre is brought into visibility on the stage – expressing social relations in theatrical form.	Students to complete textual analysis of the play for events, facts, questions, and circumstances.
Week 9	Brechtian Scenic Analysis 2: Contradiction and Alienation and Gestus We will explore Brecht's ideas on the contradictory aims that drive characters (in parallel with Stanislavsky's balancing of objective and obstacle) and explore the concept of 'alienation' (or defamiliarization) in Brechtian theatre.	Students will prepare short excerpts of <i>Mother Courage</i> and her Children, including moments where they use, Gestus, for presentation in the following week's class.
Week 10	Gestus in Practice This session will explore Brecht's specific mode physical action and the spatial composition of the stage to express social relations.	Finalize pairings/groups for Scene Study presentations
Week 11	Scene Study Preparation 1 Preparing scene study work on <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> and <i>Mother Courage</i>.	None
Week 12	Scene Study Preparation 2 - Continued work on preparing scene studies. - The final exam will take place in the week following the last class. The exam session will take place at the usual class time and in the same location as the weekly classes.	None

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- TBC
- List of course-related trips. The terms "field studies" and "field trip" have been substituted by "course-related trips". All these references should be changed to "course-related trips"

REQUIRED READINGS:

- The Cherry Orchard*, Anton Chekhov
- Mother Courage & Her Children*, Bertolt Brecht
- An Actor Prepares*, Konstantin Stanislavsky



- *Brecht on Theatre*, Edited by John Willett

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- *The Directors Handbook*, Katie Mitchell
- *Active Analysis*, by Maria Knebel in *Stanislavsky's Active Analysis* by James Thomas
- *Respect For Acting*, Uta Hagen
- *Becoming An Actor Creator*, Nikolai Demidov