

**UWO Department of English 2010-11**  
**English 2450E: Modern Drama**  
**UCC 65, T 9:30-10:30; Th 9:30-11:30**

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Office hours 2010 (fall term): T 10:30-11:30; TH 11:30-1:30

Office hours 2011 (winter term): TH 1:30-4:30

## **1. “The Activist Stage”: course overview**

In the multimedia universe we have endless choices: TV and the movies, film and music downloads, live-streaming audio and video, YouTube – you name it. So why choose theatre? What is live performance good for, now that we have a screen for every need? This course will address these questions, and more. My goal is to convince you that, as an activist genre designed to explore the most marginal, invisible, and uncomfortable aspects of human being, modern theatre has always been an urgent public practice – and is more urgent now than ever.

We will examine how the turn toward “realism” reinvigorated the stage at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe, and what legacies that turn created; we will consider the twentieth-century theatre as a place in which the margins could talk back to the keepers of public decorum and the authorities of empire; we will think about why the contemporary theatre is a particularly apt site from which to confront the unthinkable, unknowable, unimaginable horrors of terrorism and atrocity; and we will assess theatre’s value as a place where we can all develop the tools necessary to become global citizens.

This won’t be a typical modern drama class: we’re not going to spend that much time reading canonical texts, and a number of playwrights you might expect to find on a course like this won’t be appearing under our microscopes. Instead, we’ll be focusing on the broader ethos of the modern period, and how that ethos has resonated; in other words, this course will explore how and why modern drama matters right here, right now.

## **2. Assessment**

Assessment will be based on: a performance response (5%); an annotated bibliography (10%); a research paper draft #1 (15%); a research paper draft #2 (20%); class performances/participation (15%); and a final exam (35%).

Please note the following policy as set out by The University of Western Ontario:

**STUDENTS MUST PASS BOTH TERM WORK AND THE FINAL EXAMINATION (IN COURSES WITH FINAL EXAMINATIONS) IN ORDER TO PASS THE COURSE. STUDENTS WHO FAIL THE FINAL EXAMINATION (REGARDLESS OF THEIR TERM MARK) AUTOMATICALLY FAIL THE COURSE. I must receive all your term work no later than 48 hours before the final exam in order for you to be eligible to pass the term and sit the final exam.**

### 3. Texts

The following texts will be required reading for this course:

*The Broadview Anthology of Drama, Volume 2*

Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children* (Methuen edition, trans. Kushner)

Churchill, *Top Girls* (Continuum edition)

Griselda Gambaro, *Information for Foreigners* (Northwestern UP edition)

Nottage, *Ruined* (Theatre Communications Group edition)

Parks, *Venus* (Theatre Communications Group edition)

Redhill, *Goodness* (Coach House edition)

Sater and Sheik, *Spring Awakening: A New Musical* (Theatre Communications Group edition)

Sewell, *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America* (Currency edition)

Strindberg, *Miss Julie* (Oxford UP edition)

Wedekind, *Spring Awakening* (Faber edition, trans. Jonathan Franzen)

Custom course reader

Plays and anthologies are all available for purchase at the UWO bookstore; the course reader is available through InPrint (both locations are in the basement of UCC). As is often the case for full-year courses, the bill for the sum of these books will be hefty; you may want to stagger your purchases, as many of the above titles will not come up in class for some time. You may also want to check online book dealers like amazon.ca. For those of you who would prefer not to purchase all of your books, a copy of each text is on reserve at the Weldon library, as is a copy of each item in the custom course reader.

### 4. A Word from our Teaching Assistant, André Cormier

Welcome, everyone, to English 2450E: Modern Drama. I look forward to helping you find success through all sorts of collective good work this year. As a PhD student and as a community player, I hope that you will feel comfortable drawing on my experience with modern drama both as an academic and as a performer. Please do not hesitate to email me or visit me in my office to discuss the course and its texts, or your ideas and your writing. My email address is [acormie4@uwo.ca](mailto:acormie4@uwo.ca). I make it a rule to respond to emails within 24 hours (week-ends can be a different story; asking about the meaning of life the day before an exam can be a story similar to week-ends. . .). My office is **UC 51** in the basement of University College and my office hours are **TBD**, but I do tend to encourage appointments beyond any office hours I set. I look forward to the work we will accomplish together this year!

### 5. Course Objectives

Students who successfully complete this course can expect to be able to do the following:

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- think, speak and write clearly and coherently about theatre as performance, and about performance's specific value as a mode of public and cultural communication;
- understand and communicate some of the relationships among theory, history, text and performance in relation to the drama of the long twentieth century;
- speak and perform intelligently and with some confidence in front of their peers;
- craft strong research questions that invite investigation and debate;
- distinguish among poor, fair, good and excellent research materials;
- prepare annotated bibliographies, including evaluative information about the strength and weakness of each source;
- research and prepare papers of up to 3000 words, sustaining a complex argument and engaging at some depth with secondary source materials.

I have prepared our course with these objectives in mind, and I am available at any time should you need assistance with any one of them. I'd also encourage you to make goals and objectives for yourself for the year, and to share those with André and me.

## **6. Class Culture: rights and responsibilities**

A university class is a team effort: we work together to make the year a valuable learning experience for all of us. To that end, we all need to accept some responsibilities.

Kim's responsibilities to the class, and to you:

- 1. You can expect me to be on time and prepared for all our meetings together,** inside or outside class time. I spend a substantial amount of time ensuring that I am able to guide our discussions profitably; my responsibility to our mutual work is no different than yours in this regard.
- 2. You can expect me to be available for consultation regularly.** My office hours are listed at the top of this document; I am also available by appointment.
- 3. Email is my preferred method of communication,** and you can expect to receive a response to any email you have sent me within 24 hours. I am happy to offer brief advice about class material or assignments online, but please note that for substantive queries you will need to speak to me in person in my office.
- 4. All assignments handed in on time will be graded and returned within 2 weeks of the due date;** late assignments will be graded as my and André's time permits. All returned assignments will be accompanied by a numerical grade and a detailed, typed evaluation based upon the following criteria:
  - solid, clear thesis argument;
  - consistent and original argumentation throughout;
  - effective use of secondary source material, where applicable;
  - fluid, clear writing style, with minimal grammatical and/or typographical errors
  - proper citation style (see below)
- 5. You can expect me to treat all your questions and comments with respect,** and to take your concerns seriously. If you're having a problem, please come talk to me about it!

Your responsibilities to the class, to André, and to me:

1. **I expect you to come to class on time, and prepared**, for each of our meetings. We will read roughly one play per week, and although plays take relatively little time to read compared to novels, you should still budget 2-3 hours to read a play of 100 pages or less in length. If you don't understand something or are confused by the structure of a work, struggle through it, make note of your difficulties, and bring your questions either to class or to my office hours. Working through tough material will occasionally be part of our job in this class, and we will do it together.

2. **I expect you to set goals for yourself.** You might pose yourself an academic challenge, or a personal one. I will be asking each of you to visit me in my office during the first few weeks of term; we can discuss your background, interests and goals then. You are of course free to visit me as often as you wish during the term to discuss your progress or any concerns you might have; if my door is open, you can come on in.

3. **I expect you to support one another** by encouraging each other's work, by asking tough questions during class, and by using one another as a resource. You'll be working closely with several peers in your performance groups over the course of the year, and these peers will become more than group members; they will become a support network, and perhaps even good friends. Use them wisely; when you need help, ask.

4. **I expect you to respect one another**, and André and me, especially during our frequent group discussions. Be aware that we do not all come from the same background; we will each need to make allowances for different points of view based on our diverse social, sexual, and cultural experiences. Please take our differences seriously.

## 7. Written Assignments

### **Performance response (5% of final grade; due Thursday, October 21, 2010)**

- 1000 words (approx. 4 pages)
- more information about this assignment will be handed out on **September 30**.

### **Annotated bibliography (10% of final grade; due Tuesday, December 7, 2010)**

- including 6-8 sources (approx. 250 words per source)
- more information about this assignment will be handed out on **November 11**.

### **Research paper draft #1 (15% of final grade; due Thursday, March 3, 2011)**

- 3000 words (approximately 8-10 pages)
- more information about this assignment will be handed out on **January 20**.
- as part of the "drafting" process, you will share your research paper draft #1 with a peer partner during a workshop we will conduct on **Thursday, March 10**; Melanie Mills, our research librarian, will guide us through this process in order to ensure we each get maximum benefit from it.

### **Research paper draft #2 (20% of final grade; due Tuesday, April 5, 2011)**

- 3000 words (approximately 8-10 pages)
- draft #2 of your research paper will represent a substantive revision of the draft you produced in March. It may include fresh research and fresh arguments. It will address the

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concerns raised both by your workshop partner and by André or me. Typographical, spelling and grammar errors flagged on your first draft will also be corrected at this time.

### → **Written Assignments: THE RULES!**

1. All papers are due on the day specified, in hard copy only. If you cannot be in class on the day your paper is due, please bring it to the English department office, UC 173.
2. Late papers will be penalized 2% per day, excluding weekend days.
3. Extensions OF UP TO TWO DAYS will be granted if a reasonable request is made to me, in person or in writing, up to 24 hours before a paper is due. LONGER EXTENSIONS will only be granted in accordance with the university's policy on academic accommodation:

“Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments must apply to the Academic Counseling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medicalform.pdf>. The full policy is set out here: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf).”

4. All sources – including both primary and secondary, print and electronic – cited in your work must be documented using MLA style, as detailed in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. This reference guide is available in the Weldon library and online at: <http://www.lib.uwo.ca/files/styleguides/MLA.pdf>.
5. **All written material you pass in must be your own work, with all references clearly documented. PLAGIARISM, defined as “The act or an instance of copying or stealing another's words or ideas and attributing them as one's own,” is a serious academic offense, and may be punishable with sanctions up to and including expulsion from the university.** Please refer to the Calendar's section on “Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students” for more information; please see me if you are unsure whether or not you are citing a source properly.

**NOTE:** Although I do not as a matter of course pre-vet student papers using plagiarism-checking software, in cases where I suspect an offense may have occurred I reserve the right to submit your papers to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to UWO. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the current licensing agreement between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

### **8. Performance work/Participation (15% of final grade)**

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In the final hour of most Thursday classes (beginning in our third week together, on September 30) we will forego the formalities of a traditional university lecture and get down to the business of performance. I will be dividing the class into 5 groups, and on performance Thursdays YOU will run our final hour. Here's how it will work.

→ **Our performance hour will begin with a scene study presentation by the group designated, for that week, as THE COMPANY.**

- it will be the Company's job to stage a scene from that week's play, and to take up roles such as actors, director, and designers. The scenes you perform will be "poor" theatre in the best sense of the word: I do NOT expect you to get up a formal, heavily rehearsed performance, although you are free to bring props and costume touches as you choose. Your primary task will be to work together to select a specific approach to the scene, to do some research about it, and then to speak critically about your choices in class. **This "thought work" is the most important component of your presentation!**
- the Company will need to read ahead, and agree on a scene (or scenes) to perform in advance of their scheduled Thursday(s). You need not clear your scene selection with me in advance, but please choose something that will take approximately 10-15 minutes (no more than 15 minutes, please!) to perform.
- those who aren't acting or directing in any given week must contribute behind the scenes: by helping to imagine potential angles for the performance, by working on props or design, or by doing research to help shape and frame the presentation. (See the attached document, "Group Work: Tips and Tricks," for more info.)
- you will want to do some RESEARCH about the context of the play and the scene on which you're working. Of course we'll be talking about contexts in class, but remember that you'll be preparing for your scene well before we get to the play as a group. If you're not familiar with the time or place in which the play is set, or the social or political ideas arising from it, you will want to hit the library or the web.
- I would like to see each of you try different roles over the course of the year. If you are shy, challenge yourself to try acting once; if you're a raging extrovert (like me), challenge yourself to pull back a bit and let the quieter members of your group shine.
- be prepared to meet outside of class for an hour or two, at least a couple of times, before each performance, and establish an informal email discussion list or Facebook page in order to hammer out your basic choices and ensure everyone knows their jobs.
- your groups will be large, so coordinating your schedules will *not* be easy. In fact, it's part of the challenge. But your groups are large because performance cannot happen with just a couple of people: theatre is made in the messy coordination between different personalities with different schedules and different needs. Do your best to accommodate everyone, to get to know one another, and to support one another. By the end of term, you'll be glad these people are your colleagues; they may even be your friends!
- **after each performance, and a short break, the Company will be asked to get back on stage and participate in a question-and-answer period.** Each member of the Company should try to contribute something during the Q&A, especially those whose work has been primarily behind the scenes. This is the time for you to explore in depth, with your colleagues, the terrific thought work that has gone into your presentation!

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→ **The final part of the hour will involve a post-performance discussion, led by either André or me but built by you. Those not performing in any given week will be designated as THE COLLEAGUE-CRITICS.**

- when the week's performance is over, the Company will take a break while the rest of us get into our designated groups. You will be given 10 minutes in your group to discuss the performance you've just seen, and to prepare one or two *good, challenging questions* about it. Learning to ask a good question will be a key part of this work!
- note that the questions you develop must delve below the surface of what the performance is doing. **Colleague-Critics are reviewers with a difference: your task is to explore the critical effects of the Company's choices, to offer alternative readings of the scene, and to examine how others in the class received the performance** (it's a good idea to address some questions to your fellow audience members as well!). One important proviso: colleague criticism is designed to be helpful and respectful, not hurtful and derogatory!
- in order to ensure your group's discussion runs smoothly, each of you will need to take some notes during the performance; bring those notes with you to your group's "huddle" and be prepared to talk about them.
- when your time is up, we will reconvene the class and ask each group in turn to offer one of its questions. We'll get a lively discussion going, and will bounce from group to group until either our time, or your notes, are exhausted. **As you prepare your comments and questions in your huddle, remember that one of your tasks for the afternoon is to support a strong, engaged class discussion: make it a point of pride!**

### **8b) Performance work/Participation: Assessment**

Your group work is the core component of your participation grade; you will be judged on the amount of effort you put into the work – NOT on your acting skills – and on your willingness to push yourselves in new directions. If you're a shy person, you can easily score a high participation mark by finding roles for yourself within your comfort zone, and by challenging yourself to work outside of your comfort zone from time to time. Note that you need not play a major role in each presentation: balance your commitments to the group work as needed.

I am looking for each of you to do well in our group work; it gives me real pleasure to assign top marks to students who push themselves to take risks and expand their horizons. That said, your grade will also hinge on the following objective criteria:

1. **Attendance.** One of the principal keys to doing well at this work is attending regularly; the other key is being engaged when you do attend. **Each time you miss a performance *without prior leave* during which your group is the Company you will lose 3/15 participation marks.** If you need for any reason to miss a performance you must make arrangements with me *and* with your group well in advance. **Each time you miss an "ordinary" Thursday without prior leave you will lose 1/15 marks.**
2. **Regular postings to your group's blog.** The group performance and discussion work we do in this class is designed to get you thinking in more depth not just about the texts

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we read, but about yourself: about *what you are capable of doing*. Each time your group performs, I'd like you to spend some time writing about the experience. What went well? What's been challenging? How did you meet those challenges?

If you visit the WebCT site for this class, you'll see that each group has a blog set up for its members. Each time a group is The Company, every group member will be expected to post at least one paragraph about his or her experience researching and preparing for the performance. Your posts must be complete and available for the rest of the class to read by 9pm on the day before your performance takes place. **Each time you miss a blog post, you will lose 2/15 participation marks.**

Your posts may be as personal or as impersonal as you like, and the tone you adopt can, of course, change from post to post. The only requirement is that all of your posts be thoughtful, respectful, and self-aware.

**3. My and André's regular responses to your performance work.** After each performance, the Company's members can expect a page of comments from one of us on their work, including a grade. The comments and grade will assess the critical quality of your performance (IE: your thought work, NOT your acting!), as well as the quality of your group's responses to questions during our post-performance talkback. **Each of your performances will be worth 5 marks; at the end of the year, the cumulative total of your performance grades will make up 1/3 of your overall participation mark.**

## 9. Research librarian

Melanie Mills ([Melanie.mills@uwo.ca](mailto:Melanie.mills@uwo.ca)) is our research librarian; she will be working with us in class four times throughout the year, and she will be guiding you in all your research assignments. You can contact her at any time for additional help; she will also be holding regular office hours in the English department (times TBA).

## 10. Website

Our WebCT site includes important course documents (like your syllabus!), a threaded discussion tool for communicating with one another after hours, and, of course, your group blogs. Please familiarize yourself with it as soon as possible; let me know if you have problems with access.

## 11. Class Schedule

T September 14: introduction  
TH September 16: Singer (reader)

T September 21: Zola (reader)  
TH September 23: Nield (reader); Diamond (reader)

T September 28: Strindberg, *Miss Julie*; preface to *Miss Julie* (in the Oxford UP edition)  
TH September 30: Strindberg con't; **GROUP 1 is THE COMPANY**

**\*Detailed information on your performance response assignment handed out today.**

T October 5: Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler* (Broadview anthology)  
TH October 7: Ibsen con't; **GROUP 2 is THE COMPANY**

T October 12: Robins and Bell, *Alan's Wife* (reader)  
TH October 14: Robins and Bell con't; **GROUP 3 is THE COMPANY**

T October 19: Wedekind, *Spring Awakening*  
TH October 21: Wedekind con't; **RESEARCH WORKSHOP #1 (w/Melanie Mills)**  
**\*Performance responses due today.**

T October 26: Beckett, *Play* (Broadview anthology)  
TH October 28: Beckett con't; **GROUP 4 is THE COMPANY**

T November 2: Stanislavsky (reader)  
TH November 4: Stanislavsky con't; Brecht (theory in your reader only)

T November 9: Brecht (theory) con't  
TH November 11: **RESEARCH WORKSHOP #2 (w/Melanie Mills)**  
**\*Detailed information on your annotated bibliography assignment handed out today.**

T November 16: Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*  
Th November 18: Brecht (*Mother Courage*) con't; **GROUP 5 is THE COMPANY**

T November 23: Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard* (Broadview anthology)  
Th November 25: Chekhov con't; **GROUP 1 is THE COMPANY**

T November 30: Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Broadview anthology)  
Th December 2: Williams con't; **GROUP 2 is THE COMPANY**

T December 7: catch-up/check-in day. Bring your questions + confusion!  
**\*Annotated bibliographies due today.**

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T January 4: Beagan, *Miss Julie: Sheh'mah* (online)  
Th January 6: Beagan con't; **NO PERFORMANCE TODAY (surprises await)**

T January 11: Churchill, *Top Girls*  
Th January 13: Churchill con't; **GROUP 3 is THE COMPANY**

T January 18: Hughes/Split Britches, *Dress Suits to Hire* (reader)  
Th January 20: Hughes/Split Britches con't; **GROUP 4 is THE COMPANY**  
**\*Detailed information on your research paper draft #1 handed out today.**

T January 25: Parks, *Venus*; Parks, "Possession" (reader)  
Th January 27: Parks con't; **GROUP 5 is THE COMPANY**

T February 1: Sater and Sheik, *Spring Awakening: A New Musical*

Th February 3: Sater and Sheik con't; **GROUP 1 is THE COMPANY**

T February 8: Laub (reader)

Th February 10: Kramer (reader); **RESEARCH WORKSHOP #3 (w/Melanie Mills)**

T February 15: Gambaro, *Information for Foreigners*

Th February 17: Gambaro con't; **GROUP 2 is THE COMPANY**

**February 21-25: Reading Week (try not to get a sunburn!)**

T March 1: Ehn, *Maria Kizito* (reader)

Th March 3: Ehn con't; **GROUP 3 is THE COMPANY**

**\*Research paper draft #1 due today; you will exchange your paper with your peer partner in class.**

T March 8: Ehn con't

Th March 10: **RESEARCH WORKSHOP #4 (w/Melanie Mills)**

T March 15: Nottage, *Ruined*

Th March 17: Nottage con't; **GROUP 4 is THE COMPANY**

T March 22: Sewell, *Myth, Propaganda...*

Th March 24: Sewell con't; **GROUP 5 is THE COMPANY**

T March 29: Redhill, *Goodness*

Th March 31: Redhill con't; **ALL-STARS PERFORMANCE (starring Kim, André, and...?)**

T April 5: review

**\*Research paper draft #2 due today.**

Th April 7: final details, the 2011 Kimmy Awards, and warm summer wishes!

## **Group Work Tips + Tricks 2010-11**

So you've read my syllabus and you're a bit nervous. What's a "Company" anyway? What if I hate my group? I'm terrified of acting!

Take a deep breath, and relax: I understand what you're going through. The group work – scene studies and Q+A periods – is not designed to create stress and get you to drop the course; it is designed to push you to think about theatre in a brand new way: as theatre. Plays aren't (just) literature; they are blueprints for performance. While in many English classes you will be working within the traditions of Western literary theory and criticism, in this class we will be working within the traditions of a slightly different discipline: theatre and performance studies. A big part of that work is understanding play texts in and through our bodies, on the stage.

### **So what is a theatre company, anyway?**

A theatre company is a complex organism: it consists of a bunch of actors, of course, but also a massive number of people behind the scenes, from artistic directors to production managers to lighting, set and costume designers to construction and technical teams. You can easily get a sense of what a theatre company is all about by tooling around online. Check out the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, one of the largest, oldest and most well respected companies in this country, or its rival company down the highway, the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Famous companies beyond our borders include the Royal Shakespeare Company (Stratford-Upon-Avon), Steppenwolf (Chicago), and the Berliner Ensemble (guess where). If your tastes are more eclectic, investigate Ex Machina (Quebec City), Cheek By Jowl (London, UK), or the Wooster Group (NYC). There are hundreds of other companies across Canada and beyond; see what you can find (and impress me by telling me about a company of which I didn't know!).

### **How do we turn our groups into companies?**

The basic structure of a theatre company is as follows. You may use this template as a model, if you wish, for figuring out how to organize your own performances; alternately, you may choose to be less formal and more collective about the way you arrange your group work.

#### **1. Artistic Director**

This is the person whose thinking organizes much of what is produced, and how it is produced, in a theatre company. He or she has a vision for what the company is doing and why. This vision underlies the choices s/he makes when directing a play, and often informs the choices other directors make when working with the company. For your purposes, an artistic director might be the one to select a scene or scenes to perform, to develop a performance concept, and then to offer both to the group for consultation. His or her vision would organize the performance, but would leave room for other group members to inject their own creativity into its realization.

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## **2. Public Relations Manager**

PR is important whether a company is large or small: getting out notice of a show, getting reviewers to come, and talking about why a play is really important for right here and right now are all the job of a PR manager. While we aren't pressed for press in this class, I'd still like us always to think about what public, social value lies in performing the plays we are studying. If you were staging your scene in the "real" world, where would you want to stage it, and why? What impact would you want to make? Who would your target audience be? Consider assigning a group member to think these questions through.

## **3. Director**

The director is the person who realizes in detail the vision of a particular production (as opposed to the Artistic Director, who is focused on the longer-term vision of the company as a whole). Your group may choose to always use a director, to direct a performance collectively amongst yourselves, or to try a combination of them both.

## **4. Technical Manager**

Like most theatre companies today, we have access to plenty of tech in our classroom. You can use these tools any way you wish – last year, one group created a film to communicate in real time with their live performance, while another Skyped a performer in from my office! In order to make sure you're using your tech effectively (and not just because it's cool), you'll need someone with skills and savvy to coordinate it all.

## **5. Actors**

No performance can go off without actors! Many of you will want to act all the time, and many others will want to avoid acting as long as possible. But remember: the goal of our performance work is to challenge ourselves, push beyond our comfort zones a bit. My advice: if you love acting, make room for others by taking on a "back stage" role at some point; if you're terrified of acting, tell your group members so, and ask them to help you push yourself to act, at least a little, at some point. In the past, students who have pushed themselves in this way have reaped enormous personal satisfaction, won the respect of their classmates, and earned high participation marks.

## **6. Set, Lights, Costumes and Props: the Designers**

Big companies will employ separate set, lighting, and costume designers, as well as a props master; smaller companies will often combine these roles. We don't have a budget, which means we need to be creative about props, costumes, and the like. Share the burden: perhaps assign one or two group members to organize props and costumes, and then donate materials as you can. Our lighting in UCC 65 isn't very sophisticated, but you can play around with flashlights or other portable light sources. For your sets, consider paper, pen, and fabric; one student last year built a subway car out of cardboard!

Not all of these roles will fit your group's best working practices; please feel free to pick, choose, add, subtract, augment, or otherwise dispense with the above as you see fit, but do give it some thought. Observe, too, what other groups are doing, and talk with your group members about what you liked or didn't like about others' approaches. We learn a lot from each other!

### **The Company: Helpful Hints**

**1. Start early.** So your first performance isn't for a month? You'll see from my syllabus which play you'll be performing; get a head start by reading it now. Start thinking and talking. Make a plan for a first group meeting – well ahead of time.

**2. Develop fair systems of communication, and keep the whole group in the loop.**

Develop an email list, FaceBook group, or the like to stay in touch. When it comes to in-person gatherings, know that not everybody is going to be able to attend every group meeting; do your best to come up with meeting and rehearsal times that suit everyone, but if that's not possible, manage the problem. Perhaps hold a couple of meetings; perhaps use Skype, MSN or FB to include those who can't be present in person.

**3. If you have to be absent, tell your group members.** It's simple courtesy; others will be relying on you to pull your weight.

**4. Nobody likes The Boss.** If you are the kind of person who always takes charge, you will likely be needed for this work, and your colleagues will appreciate you – but only if you work hard to make room for everyone. Remember that you're not the only one with ideas, vision, and the skills to make it happen.

**5. If you're shy, take a risk and raise your hand.** The biggest problem group work generates is the classic battle of the introverts and the extroverts. If you are an introvert, you will face an uphill fight; everyone in your group will need to be sensitive to this, but you will also need to take active responsibility for finding a way to make your voice heard. If someone in your group isn't making room for you, call them on it.

**6. For every choice your group makes, know the reason!** Nothing on stage is an accident. Remember that you'll be asked questions about your choices; be thinking about them all through your preparations, and be ready to engage!

### **So what about the Colleague-Critics?**

For me, the best part about going to the theatre is attending “talkbacks,” or post-performance discussions. They don't happen all the time, of course, but when they do they are an excellent opportunity to delve deeply into the work done by all the different members of a theatre company. For me, talkbacks are a teaching and learning experience, and I hope they will be for our class as well.

The Colleague-Critics are the keys to a great talkback: the questions they ask can teach us more about a play than an hour of me lecturing every could. But this means the CC role is also a real challenge: how do you ask a good question? How do you keep a discussion going? We'll be working on this stuff all term, but for now here are a few hints to help you develop the skills you'll need to be productive critics.

### **The Colleague-Critics: Helpful Hints**

**1. Use your prep time wisely.** You'll be getting 10 minutes to talk together about the Company's performance and to build one or two good questions. Spend this time thinking not just about what you *noticed* during the performance, but *why* you noticed certain things, and what effect they had on your thinking about the play.

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**2. Never ask a superficial question if a deeper, more probing question lies just below the surface.** Say the Company stages a play by cross-casting it: all the boys play girls, and vice versa. Why did they do that? They'll have a reason, no doubt, but I bet you do too. Instead of asking "why did you do that?" try this question: "I noticed you cross-cast the performance, and, as I result, I read the scene in this new way. Can you talk about why you made this choice, and what you think you gained from it?"

**3. Don't forget about the other members of the audience!** What did your fellow classmates think about a particularly daring production choice? You can ask them, too!

**4. Don't let a good thread dangle. Pull at it!** If you ask a great question and get a one-note answer, try again; rephrase your question, or perhaps put it to the audience to see if other students' responses are the same as the Company's.

**5. Keep your discussion on track, and focused.** This is easier said than done! Here are some ways you might make the very best use of your 10-minute "huddle" each week:

- take notes during the performance, and bring those to your group;
- sit in a circle so everyone can hear and see everyone else;
- go *around* the circle to start; ask everyone to say what they noticed, liked, or didn't like about the performance;
- look for connections between different group members' observations; use those connections as the starting point for your question;
- try a "PASS" exercise: someone with a strong idea for a question might state it to begin, then "pass" the idea to the next person in the circle. That person can paraphrase the question, or make a modification, and then pass it along again, slightly changed. The next person modifies, and so on, until you reach what your group considers to be the "ideal" question.
- got time left? I know the weekend starts ASAP, but try to stay in the room; grab another idea and have another go!

**Phew! That's a lot of information, Kim.**

I know it's easy to feel a bit overwhelmed at all of this. **Keep in mind, though, that this document is intended as a reference only; it's not a hard-and-fast instruction manual.** Much of what happens in your group work you'll discover on your own, as best fits your needs. The most important component of the performances and the talkbacks is the thought you put into it; everything else is ultimately just icing.

Don't let this work become a burden: it's meant to be a pleasure, as stimulating as, but rather more fun than, writing a paper. If it stops being fun, come to see me. Meanwhile: enjoy!

KS