

## Senior Seminar: Dramaturgy

### Description:

Dramaturgy is not just a relatively new field in American theater—it's also the practice of exploring theater-making from all possible angles. Through readings, discussions, exercises, and engagement with current theater, we will learn more about the why and how of theater, for ourselves and for our community. The class will culminate in a presentation of your work on a show you have "dramaturged" throughout the semester.

### Required Texts:

- *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Source Book*, ed. Jonas, Proehl, Lupu
- Course Packet

### Schedule:

1/9 Introductions. What is Dramaturgy? And Why?

1/14 **Read:** "The Compleat Dramaturg," by Leon Katz  
"Dramaturgy: An Overview," by Anne Cattaneo  
"Introduction," *And Then You Act*, by Anne Bogart  
Exercise: Different types of dramaturgical questions

1/16 **Library Day: Meet in McHenry Library at 4:00.**

**Read:** "Intention," *And Then You Act*, by Anne Bogart  
"Dramaturg in Collaboration with Joseph Chaikin"

**Due at end of class:** Production History assignment

1/21 [MLK DAY: Holiday!]

1/23 **Due:** Black History Month assignment

**Read:** "Funnyhouse of a Negro," by Kennedy  
"Unfinished Women Cry...", by Rahman  
"Spell 7...", by Shange

1/28 **Presentation of letter to the director**

**Read:** "Production Dramaturgy: Pre-rehearsal Explorations," by Mark Bly

1/30 Basics of Play Analysis: Knowing what you need to know.

**Read:** *The Poetics (On Poetry and Style)* excerpt  
"Conceiving the Forms," by Lee Devin

2/4 Basics of Production Analysis: "Reading" the Stage.

**Read:** "The Sign in the Theatre," by Tadeusz Kowzan  
"Theatre as Sign-System" and the Pavis questionnaire

Exercise: Semiotic Analysis in Practice

2/6 **Read:** "Shaping Critical Spaces," by Heidi Gilpin

"Source-Work, the Viewpoints, and Composition: What are They?" by Tina Landau

Exercise: Analyzing movement

**Guest Speaker:** Sommer Ulrickson

**2/11 Present production history**

**Read:** "The Dramaturgy Reader," by Mark Lord

"Textual Collidings," by Jim Niesen

"Dramaturgy on the Road to Immortality: The Wooster Group"

Exercise: Adapting non-dramatic works into theater

**2/13 Read:** "Rebottling," by Cary M. Mazer

"Aiming the Canon at Now," by Susan Jonas

"The Dramaturg and the Irrational," by Jayme Koszyn

Exercise: Conceptualizing classic plays

2/18 [Holiday]

2/20 **Read:** *Woyzeck*

**Discuss *Random With A Purpose 16***

2/25 **Due:** Version of *Woyzeck*

**Read:** "Terror" and "Embarrassment," by Anne Bogart

2/27 The role of visual research.

**Read:** "Exploration through Imagery: Gregory Gunter Talks about Working with Anne Bogart"

"Visual Composition, Mostly," by Richard Foreman

**Production Discussion**

**3/3 Present visual research**

Guest speaker: Roger Copeland

3/5 **Read:** "Tony Kushner's *Angels*," by Susan Jonas

**Discuss production**

**3/10 Present historical and/or contemporary research**

3/12 **Read:** *Helen*

**Production discussion**

3/17 **Read:** "The Program as Performance Text," by Nicholas Rzhevsky

**Present ideas for programs or post-production talk**

Wrap-up!

**FINAL Presentation of casebooks**

Friday, March 21, 7:30–10:30 P.M.

### Academic Integrity

The official UCSC policy governing Academic Integrity is available at [http://www.ucsc.edu/academics/academic\\_integrity/](http://www.ucsc.edu/academics/academic_integrity/). Suspected cases of plagiarism or other cheating will be handled strictly according to those policies. If you have any questions about what exactly constitutes plagiarism, please read the website and talk to me. I don't accept papers that have been submitted to other classes.

### Requirements

Attendance, participation, post-show discussions, in-class exercises (15%)

Assignments:

Library research (5%)

Choosing a one-act play (5%)

Version of *Woyzeck* (10%)

3-pp review of one of the required productions (due on the day of class discussion) (10%)

In-progress versions of the below:

Letter to the Director (5%)

Production History (5%)

Visual Research (5%)

Historical and/or contemporary Research (5%)

Programs or Post-Production Talk (5%)

Final Production Casebook 30%

## **Final Project: Production Casebook**

- Can be done singly or in pairs
- Will result in a complete production casebook, including:
  - Letter to Director
  - Production History
  - Historical and/or contemporary research
  - Visual Research
  - Program notes
  - Post-Production Talk
  - Script/parts of script

This can take any (theatrical) form. The point is to create an idea for performance, which you do the dramaturgy for. The project will begin with a "Letter to the Director" that states your intentions. As with all good productions, your concept will evolve throughout the course of the project. But you must start somewhere.

Ideas:

**\*Stage a classic play.** (Shakespeare, the Greeks, etc.) It will have an extensive performance history, and it will provide rich grounds for historical/production research, textual shaping, contemporary analysis (why do it now?), etc.

**\*Choose a play that presents a huge social problem for contemporary audiences.** (*Taming of the Shrew*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, etc.) Figure out why you want to address this problem now. This will focus on contemporary analysis, research, and textual shaping. You may need to adapt the text for your project—weave, splice, interlink, etc.

**\*Adapt a non-theatrical text for the stage.** Or assemble pieces of drama, poetry, prose, visual art, news reports, media, into a dramatic piece. This will be most useful for people interested in the creative/collaborative aspects of dramaturgy.

**\*Pick a contemporary play and go for it.** This will give you the satisfaction of doing a complete production and critical history and showing off your powers of analysis and social awareness.

Find something that intrigues, excites, stimulates, or angers you, and make sure you feel a NEED for its creation as a theater piece.

## Choosing a One-Act Play Assignment

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Assignment due Wednesday, Jan. 23

Write a 2pp letter to a director or artistic director in Santa Cruz describing your choice of play for February's Black History Month celebration. You have been charged with choosing between Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, Aishah Rahman's *Unfinished Women Cry...*, and ntozake shange's *Spell #7....*. The director has decided to do a one-act play by an African-American woman, and cannot decide between these 3.

Your brief (two-page) letter should clearly state why the play you have chosen will be the best choice for the specific audience (at UCSC, or if you wish, in Santa Cruz at large). You should address (briefly) questions of dramatic construction, social relevance, accessibility, theatricality, language, etc. In other words, *make a good argument*. Don't just say which one you like best.

Use the readings to help you determine what kinds of questions you, as a good dramaturg, should ask.

**Woyzeck assignment**

Due Feb 25 in class

Length:3-4pp

Read the play carefully 2-3 times, keeping in mind that the scene order before you is arbitrary. (The scenes were found on separate pages and have been put together in a mostly linear narrative.) Think about what themes and questions emerge for you and how to effectively bring them to life theatrically.

Come up with a production concept. Outline it clearly and succinctly. For the purposes of this assignment, you *must* re-arrange the scenes to fit your vision, and some *must* be cut. This concept must involve the following (not necessarily in this order):

1. Where you want to stage it (campus, downtown, which venue) and why.
2. A list of themes/questions you want to explore.
3. A new order for the scenes. (i.e., 4, 3, 7, 12, 1, .....
4. A justification for the first scene (why it's first) and the last scene (why it's last).
5. A justification of why you've cut the scenes you've cut.
6. Basic design ideas and reasons.
  - Stage: proscenium? environmental? In the round?
  - For lights and costumes, you may choose a color palette or something similar to indicate your general atmosphere and semiotic direction.

Goals for this assignment:

To think about play structure and theatricality, dramaturgically speaking. To put your thoughts into effective theatrical practice. To be specific about the thought behind a production.

Final Assignment, due Wednesday, March 21 (during final, 7:30-10:30pm)

### **Dramaturgy Production Casebook**

*Why a dramaturgy casebook?* A dramaturgy casebook encompasses all aspects of production. It is the compilation of information and ideas you have had while thinking about and working on a project. The casebook is the only written document that records the conceptual process as well as the research that went into the show. For this reason, it will be invaluable to people who want an insight into your work—what your process was, what helped shape your production, what research you did, etc.

A Table of Contents is strongly encouraged.

Contents will include:

- I. Letter to Director
- II. Production History
- III. Historical and/or Contemporary Research
- IV. Visual Research
- V. Program Notes (layout optional)
- VI. Post-Production Talk
- VII. Script/parts of script

**I. Letter to Director. (2-3pp)** This will have evolved since your original letter; i.e., *revise it*. You may choose to still address it to the director; however, you might try writing it as a letter for “posterity.” The letter should:

- outline basic ideas/goals for the show
- acknowledge difficult questions/obstacles faced
- articulate what, for you, is of the utmost importance in doing the show

**II. Production History. (10-15 relevant reviews)** Has this play been done before? If not, has something very like it been done that we should know about? (probably)

- What did that production look like?
- Who was involved?
- What was that production’s goals?
- What did the reviewers have to say about it?
- Was it popular? controversial? unnoticed?

**III. Historical/Contemporary Research. (As much as necessary.)** If you are doing a period piece, this is where your historical research comes into play. Try to supply only the most important facts, and put them in easy-to-read formats. For example:

- If you are doing a Shakespeare history play, your duty is to supply relevant historical data about the period the play is written in.
- You should consider whether or not research about Shakespeare’s own time period is necessary.

All plays require contemporary research.

- What is going on round town/at nearby theaters? Has something like this play been done recently?
- What is going on in the (local) world of politics/culture/etc? What current events will impact the reception of your play?
- What are the issues your play raises? What information about them will be helpful to your cast and crew?

**IV. Visual Research. (Can vary from a dozen precise images to 50 atmospheric ones.)**

Thoughtfully winnowed material can be just as useful here as an overload of info. For the casebook, don't break your bank making color photocopies, but do be sure to include what strikes you as most important.

- Include images that helped shape your intellectual and thematic concepts.
- Pick exemplary images for the "feel" of the show.
- Include images that will be valuable resources for others involved in the production.

**V. Program Notes. (3-4pp)** Normally, you would just insert your program. For this casebook, include material you would like to include in the program.

- Quotes you feel shed light on the production.
- Things you want the audience to know that they won't get anywhere else.
- Images and/or texts that provide an interesting juxtaposition to the production.

**VI. Post-Production Talk. (2-3pp)** Here is something very useful for future generations interested in your show: how you presented it to the public.

- Study questions/guides for people taking groups to the performance.
- Questions you would ask at a talk-back session.
- Questions you would expect at a talk-back, and how you might answer them.
- Pertinent information that you haven't given to the audience in any other form.
- Ideas for people (or things) you would like to be present at such a talk.

**VII. Script.** Normally, the whole thing would naturally be included in the casebook, complete with cuts, adaptations, revisions, translations, etc. For this project, insert only as much as you feel is necessary to give me an idea of the show. I DO NOT want you to photocopy entire plays; however, you should probably describe for me the nature of the cuts and supply examples of the kinds of changes you'll be making. Dance shows will have their own notation.

- Let's decide this one on a case-by-case basis (i.e, SEE ME.)