

Third year - Drama and Theatre Arts

Recent Year Three Study Options have included

Value 20 credits

Playwright's Theatre

This module, taught in two-hour weekly seminars, will give students the opportunity to engage with the work of an individual playwright (different options will run in different academic years) in substantial depth. There will be a considerate overview of the playwright's work through a selection of plays that serve to illustrate his/her artistic and ideological affinities, style, as well as influences. At the same time, throughout the course there will be a consideration of the social context of the periods in which the texts were written and first produced so as to trace the mutual impact between artist and society. We will take into account information relating to the original production and noteworthy revivals of individual plays, in order to develop a stronger understanding of aesthetics, context and reception. Emphasis will be placed on situating the playwright within a broader framework of representational trends and providing a basis for the understanding of his/her individual aesthetics and ideology. We will concentrate on an individual case study each week (in cases of shorter plays or prose pieces these will be 2 per week), taking into account the factors contributing to the enduring relevance of the play and establishing a narrative of playwrighting traditions in the context of other work that links to it thematically, both synchronically and diachronically.

Russian Theatre, Culture and Revolution

This course examines the significance of Russian Theatre from 1898-1938, the period of Modernism and of the Russian Revolution a period of fervent political and social change, in which ideas of theatre which continue to influence us now, were formed. The course aims to enable the student to understand the relevance of the particular social, cultural and historical context in which Russian Modernist theatre developed. The relationships between theatre writing and theatre production, also between theatre and film and, the development of theories of acting will be analysed. The course will assess the importance of this period in terms of its enduring influence in Western Culture on theatre production and acting. We will look at the work of writers including Gorky, Chekhov, Mayakovsky, Blok and Erdman, with reference to productions by Stanislavski, Meyerhold and others and the film work of Eisenstein and Pudovkin.

By the end of the module students will be able to relate close study of texts and film from the period of development of Russian Modernism to the social, cultural, and historical context; show a detailed awareness and wide ranging understanding of a specified field of study; and produce a detailed, coherent and analytic written argument supported by reference to an extensive range of course materials within a clear investigative framework.

Elements of Theatre History

This module begins from the assumption that the making of theatre history (in its written form, its documents, and its colloquial traces in anecdote and tradition) is a series of choices, informed by ideological, social, and economic forces. The option will draw on students' previous and current studies of performance texts and styles to investigate how we make theatre history, what evidence we draw upon, and what implications these histories have for our study and performance of various scripts and styles. We will focus on the materiality of theatre history, by investigating aspects of the histories of existing and lost theatre buildings and/or theatre organisations in the West Midlands and London. The option will be taught by staff-led seminars, field trips where appropriate, and student-led case studies.

By the end of the module students will be able to: reflect on varieties of evidence of past theatrical activities; demonstrate (in oral and written work) an understanding of the social and ideological contexts of the making of theatre history; understand and apply specific research techniques appropriate for the object of study (e. g. methods involved in the study of material culture, textual analysis, performance analysis, and iconography and visual analysis); demonstrate his/her understanding of current theoretical approaches in the area of theatre history; as part of a small team, develop a theatre history research project; present the results of this research in both oral and written form

Theatres on Film

The module examines the ways in which theatre has been represented in films, and is not primarily concerned with adaptations of plays for the cinema (although in some cases, such as *The Entertainer*, the film derives from a play about the theatre). The module focuses on the relationship between the historiography of theatre especially in constructions of the processes of theatre history, the social context of theatre and the biographical writing and the cinematic uses of theatre.

For example: the notion of the divided self in relation to actors and acting (for example, *All About Eve*, *Being Julia*); the ideal of a democratic theatre (Shakespeare in *Love*); the appeal of the backstage drama (*42nd Street*, *Topsy-Turvy*); the theatre as a symbol of national identity and social and political life (*Mephisto*, *The Entertainer*, *Cabaret*); gender and sexuality in the theatre (*Stage Beauty*).

Most of the films will be discussed in relation to more than one of these topics: after the first introductory session, each weekly seminar will focus on one film, with examples from others being introduced either in the form of extracts shown by the lecturer or reference to others seen by students in the course of the module. Students will be expected to become familiar with the broad outlines of theatrical and film history, and more detailed knowledge of specific topics. They will be expected to conduct close readings of individual scenes and sequences.

Contemporary Theatre and Performance

This module investigates a range of experimental contemporary performance and theatre focusing on Britain and North America. Building on the theatrical enquiries of the historical avant-garde, contemporary playwrights and performance practitioners have questioned the expectations of performers and audiences about how theatre, and its mimetic double reality, might be understood, how it might be practised, and what its socio-political function might be. In doing so, they have revised, but at the same time, may have entrenched, new conventions of theatrical language, representation and subjectivity. This module will introduce students to theoretical terminology such as postmodernism, post-structuralism and the postdramatic to enable them to apply such concepts productively and accurately to the work under discussion. Artists under discussion may include: *Forced Entertainment*, the *Wooster Group*, *Goat Island*, *Martin Crimp*, *Howard Barker*; areas under discussion may include: verbatim theatre, durational and concept driven performance, physical theatre.

Upon completion of this modules, students will have developed a conceptual vocabulary that allows them to reflect critically on ideas of theatrical experimentation; a familiarity with the work of selected British and North American practitioners; an ability to engage critical and political debates surrounding experimental performance practice; experience giving oral presentations; experience in conceiving and proposing a self-devised research project in written form.

The Creative Industries

This module will introduce Final Year students to the theories and practicalities of working within the creative and cultural industries in the United Kingdom today. Seminars will introduce students to the substance and historical contexts of the central issues in cultural policy in the UK, with readings drawn from policy documents (such as those generated by Arts Council England), a range of personal and institutional histories and accounts of work within the creative industries, and critical and analytical studies of the creative and cultural industries. Guest lecturers will outline their work, and reflect on their roles and the development of their careers. Guest

lecturers include members of Drama and Theatre Arts with creative industries professional experience, guest lecturers from the West Midlands creative industries (such as the Birmingham Rep, Arts Council (England) West Midlands region; the mac), and guest lecturers invited to speak to the MRes in Playwriting termly Open Seminars. Students will be encouraged to research an area of interest for themselves in order to develop an entrepreneurial or enterprise project.

By the end of the module the student should be able to: identify an area of professional development for him or herself; demonstrate an understanding of the political, cultural, and policy frameworks within which creative and cultural practice occurs in the UK; demonstrate an understanding of a variety of policy, managerial, and artistic roles within the creative industries; demonstrate an understanding of the basic principles of arts management & enterprise such as grant applications, development of mission statements, generation of public relations & communications material; develop an outline plan for an arts enterprise project, organisation, or event; demonstrate communication skills in both oral and written presentation for a variety of audiences.

The Director and Directing

This module explores and challenges ideas and practices of directing: throughout, it aims to question and compare directors' relationships to the actor/performer, the audience/spectator, and to the theatrical material. The module will include consideration of the director's aesthetics of, for example, space, visual languages, narrative and meaning, as well as dramaturgical practices. Following an initial seminar that outlines developments in directing and a critical approach, we will examine the work of contemporary directors/practitioners who have challenged the playtext as a beginning point to theatre making, especially the work of Eugenio Barba, as well as the influence of Jacques Lecoq and comparable North American directors/companies.

These apparently physically-based practices will be compared to the work of two leading British directors, Katie Mitchell and Declan Donnellan. Importantly, the relationship to the actor of each will be drawn out. What the director does when devising will be explored next, using devised and collaborative companies as case studies; this can open up discussion of the director as facilitator, editor or dramaturg, and the role of the 'outside eye'. We will compare these modes of work to rehearsal methodologies that appear in new and contemporary writing. Finally, the idea of the director as auteur is examined with reference to selected European directors. The module is supported by a structured, week-by-week programme of reading, and theatre-going as well as attendance at appropriate departmental activities will be encouraged as a further resource for presentations and essays. We will draw on audiovisual material in class as appropriate.

Adaptation

Although adaptation has been a standard practice in theatre and performing arts, it has recently emerged as a major dramaturgical mode as well as a key term in discussions of cultural production and reception. The module will explore a wide range of adaptation practices across texts, genres and media, focusing on dramatic texts and novels adapted for stage, screen and television. We will use recent theory of adaptation to analyse strategies of transformation in both avant-garde performance and popular media, while also mapping out contemporary forms of theatrical and cinematic adaptation. Special emphasis will be given to late twentieth-century refigurations of canonical texts, especially Greek tragedy and Shakespeare. The discussion will draw attention to the historical and cultural contexts of adaptation, while also inviting further reflection on the politics of appropriation of the dramatic and literary canon.

Political Performances

This module will examine contemporary political performances including applied theatre practice, participatory theatre, verbatim performance, direct action and interventionist performance. We will explore how a performance might be defined as 'political' (given the impossibility of non-political performance), how the 'efficacy' of such work might be understood, how certain direct action events/political protests might be analysed through performance analysis, and how we might interrogate the ethics and ideological implications of applied and participatory models of practice in the context of governmental agendas and the power relationships between artists and participants.

The Art of the Actor

What is acting? Over the module, we will look at some of the key questions, assumptions and metaphors concerning the training, rehearsal and performance phases of the actor. A comparative and evaluative study of the specifics of particular acting approaches will include both historical and contemporary paradigms, which will also take account of non-Western performance. The problematic issue of emotion and psychology in acting, as well as the body in training/performance, will be reconsidered. We will also look at how the contemporary actor is positioned in some of the emerging alternative theories of how the actor's process can be understood.

Victorian Drama

This module will focus on mid-nineteenth century Victorian drama. Apart from reading established key authors the module will study drama's relationship and realization of other art forms including adaptations from popular novels, the periodical press and famous works of art. We will look at how Victorian drama exploited a multi-sensual and, indeed, multi-media experience for the audience using aural, visual and what could perhaps be described as "four D" effects in spectacular sensation drama. We will also look at genres and topics of drama such as the industrial, the melodramatic, the ghost story, and the folk tale and study the somewhat radical attitude of authors such as Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins. Students with an appreciation of art history, stagecraft or history will especially enjoy this module.

Performing Hamlet

Performing Hamlet combines the examination of the dramatic text from the point of view of performance choices and the opportunities provided in the writing and stagecraft, with study of the play's performance history in the theatre and on screen. Students will begin in the first half of the term by working through selected scenes and speeches in detail, with particular attention to their technical demands (e.g. verse-speaking, staging questions) and to their integration in the play as a whole. After reading week the module will consider the playing of these elements in a variety of available recorded performances - for example, Gielgud's 1948 radio performance, Olivier's 1948 film, Richard Burton's 1964 stage performance, Kozintsev's 1964 film, Brook's The Tragedy of Hamlet (2000) etc. Students will also examine these performances and their choices in the social and historical context of the place and time when they were produced. The reading list for the study options will include key critical and performance-history texts. The module's aim is to relate practical work on the text to performance choices and wider aesthetic and intellectual issues in the performance history of the play.

Advanced Practical Intensive

In 3-hour weekly workshop/seminars, the module provides the student with a practical skills base which can be applied to live performance work as well as performance analysis. This module provides advanced skills enhancement at level 3 in a particular area of theatre/performance practice. The module also provides frameworks in which such skills can be applied within the specifics of the module and beyond and as such the methodology for the potential application of learnt skills is a substantial component.

Alexander Technique and Performance

This course aims to provide the student with an introduction to the Alexander Technique and an insight into its application in performance. The sessions will aim to give the student an understanding of how vocal and movement skills can be improved and how to address problems of performance through the Technique. Students will work on pieces of text or other aspects of performance individually or in small groups.

Theatre in Education

The overall course will provide an introduction to theatre-in-education, examining the emergence and evolution of the form, the influences of practitioners such as Betolt Brecht, Augusto Boal and Dorothy Heathcote and the contemporary landscape. The course will be taught through a theoretical frame but explored practically through a series of workshops in weeks 1 – 8. From week 9 students will create small group pieces of theatre-in-education towards a final assessed participatory performance in week 11.

Contemporary Practice

This module will support students in making and promoting their own original artistic practice. Five initial workshops will focus on the creation of work through innovative development, fusion or critique of current practices in professional contemporary performance. There will be an emphasis on intellectual engagement with the theories which underpin such practice, and students will be expected to engage with new work showcases and other events held in Birmingham to familiarise themselves with current trends in emerging professional practice, develop networks in the city, and inform their own professional development and artistic vision. From week 4 onwards students will form groups to prepare, with support and supervision, a work-in-progress presentation for week 2 of the spring semester. As a core part of the module students will also be introduced to the skills required to market their work to funders and promoters.

Playwriting

Playwriting is a one semester module which combines study and practice. The weekly 3-hour seminar/workshops include analysis and discussion of published plays, which should have been read in advance; practical writing exercises; and seated reading of students' playscripts. Students will develop a major piece of writing (15'stage time max*), from original 'pitch' through successive drafts. To this end there are opportunities in the second half of the course (after reading week) to workshop and discuss work-in-progress, before the presentation for assessment of these pieces during class time in week

Advanced Theatre Crafts 3

The module allows students who have followed the relevant Theatre Crafts pathway in the previous two years to develop their skills within a senior role within the production team in their chosen specialised area of Stage Management, Stage Technologies or Design. They can also choose to produce an advanced theoretical design project as agreed with the tutor.

Systematic Stanislavski

This course aims to introduce students to the major developments to Stanislavski's system that took place in America. Building on Stanislavski's discoveries and exercises, American thought has gone a stage further in the realm of actor training. This has seen acting teachers in America refine Stanislavski's exercises, invent others, and furthermore arrange these exercises in a logical, systematic sequence. The result is a significant, but little-used, contribution to acting in general: training processes that gradually and systematically expand and challenge the actor - in much the same way that training in other art forms is done. This course focuses on Sanford Meisner and Lee Strasberg - the two American practitioners whose work most clearly reveals this search to be 'systematic' with Stanislavski's system.

Production Module (double credit weighting)

This module provides the student with advanced skills enhancement through applied production. 'Applied production' in this instance means that a student will rehearse, develop, and perform allocated roles within the auspices of a fully supported and designed theatre production. Learning is undertaken in a collaboratively-driven rehearsal environment, with guidance and teaching provided by a specialist director in an intensive series of workshop sessions occurring over 4 -5 weeks. These workshops culminate in production week rehearsals intended to integrate technical and design elements with acting elements. Finally, students perform in formal DTA productions with public audiences in attendance (usually, though not always, 4 total performances).

Core module

Extended Essay in Drama OR Practical Project in Drama

- Extended Essay: self-directed research on any chosen area of Theatre and Performance. The student is supported by workshops and individual supervisions to prepare, organise and execute a 6,000 word essay.
- Practical Project: self-directed group work leading to a 10-20 minute performance of practice-based research with full technical support. Each group of students is supported by workshops and allocated a supervisor to advise them throughout the process on their methodology and practice. This module provides the opportunity for students to bring together learnt skills in both academic and practical areas of the syllabus.

