

## **Introduction to Rehearsal Studies** *seminar proposal*

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### SEMINAR DESCRIPTION:

Systematic documentation and analysis of rehearsals can offer scholars and practitioners a new set of tools for learning from others' practices and critically examining their own. Rehearsal studies turns the critical eye of academic theatre research to the processes by which performances are made, yet research on theatrical rehearsal is relatively new in theatre history. The process of group rehearsal as we know it did not develop before the rise of the modern concept of a director in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but even after the contemporary method of group rehearsal began to take shape, it was many years before anyone took a serious interest in it as a phenomenon in itself.

In this seminar for advanced students of theatre and performance studies, we will look at existing accounts of rehearsal in light of their usefulness for critical theatre research. For context, we will become familiar with the small but growing body of work on the ethics and methodology of systematic rehearsal studies, including identifying relevant trends in current ethnographic theory.

### SEMINAR OBJECTIVES:

- 1) students will be able to identify the four primary "modes" of existing rehearsal data
- 2) students will engage with current work in critical theatre studies that uses rehearsal data as its primary source
- 3) students will be able to develop a plan to produce new rehearsal data, and to identify the ethical and methodological complications of conducting rehearsal research
- 4) students will be able to engage with their own and others' observations of rehearsal to develop critical analysis of one or more of the following: a) a dramatic text, b) the working method of an individual actor/director/designer, c) rehearsal processes in general, d) acting/performance theory in general

### ASSIGNMENTS:

#### #1: **Rehearsal Observation** (5-8 pages, due week 8)

Each student will be responsible for contacting the director of a performance rehearsing during the term period and obtaining permission to observe and take notes of the rehearsals on two separate occasions (5-6 hours total). The rehearsal may be for any type of performance (theatre, dance, music, etc) by any group (professional, faculty, student, local), but it must be approved by the instructor. I am also happy to speak to the director or the group on your behalf if they are hesitant. If you have trouble securing a rehearsal, see me early in the term to make alternate arrangements.

In week 8, you will turn in a 5-8 page written account of the rehearsals you observed. Although this is not a full-blown analysis, you should organize your paper around a critical observation of these rehearsals, rather than merely a chronological description.

#### #2: **Seminar Paper** (16-20 pages, due week 13, instructor must approve by week 9)

**option a)** If you have been able to secure the opportunity to observe more than a few days of rehearsal, you may do an extended casebook on the rehearsal you observed. An extended casebook requires a *minimum* of 35-40 hours of observation, beyond the two days of rehearsal

you observed for assignment #1. You may NOT use a show that you are directing, stage managing, or performing in, though I may consider approving a show that you are designing or assistant directing.

**option b)** Critical comparative analysis of at least three different accounts of rehearsal, addressing any aspect of rehearsal research— subject, methodology, ethics, applicability to the field, etc, etc. At least two of the accounts you use must be ones we have not discussed in class.

**option c)** Equivalent project or paper of an alternative structure, relevant to the topics of the seminar.

### #3: Discussion Facilitation

Each week one member of the seminar will be responsible for facilitating discussion on the assigned readings for one class. On your day to facilitate, you should come prepared with an introduction to the readings and some questions to get discussion started. You will also be responsible for guiding and managing the discussion as it progresses.

## READINGS & TERM SCHEDULE

**Week 1:** overview, syllabus, assignments

### **Week 2:** HISTORY OF REHEARSAL

Tiffany Stern. *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000.

### **Week 3-4 :** INSIDERS' ACCOUNTS OF REHEARSALS

Antony Sher, *Year of the King*. London: Chatto, 1985.

Max Stafford-Clark. *Letters to George: The Account of a Rehearsal*. London: Nick Hern Books, 1988.

excerpts from *Theatre at Work*, Charles Marowitz and Simon Trussler, eds. London: Methuen, 1967

Bill Wallis and Ed Wilson. "Portrait of a Company: University Theatre, Newcastle." *Theatre Quarterly* II, 7 (July-Sept. 1972): 28-43. (#7)

Bernard F. Dukore. "Witkiewicz's *The Beelzebub Sonata* in Hawaii." *Theatre Quarterly* V, 18 (June-Aug. 1975): 80-94. (#18)

### **Week 5:** LESSONS FROM ETHNOGRAPHY

Clifford Geertz. "Thick description: towards an interpretive theory of culture." from *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973

Dwight Conquergood. "Performing as a moral act: ethical dimensions of the ethnography of performance." *Literature in Performance* 5 (1985): 1-12.

Dwight Conquergood. "Rethinking ethnography: towards a critical cultural politics." *Communication Monographs* 58 (1991): 179-194.

**Week 6-7: OUTSIDERS' ACCOUNTS OF REHEARSALS**

Walter Donohue. "Edward Bond's *The Fool* at the Royal Court Theatre." *Theatre Quarterly* VI, 21 (Spring 1976): 12-24. (#21)

John Burgess. "Roger Planchon's *Gilles de Rais* at Villeurbanne." *Theatre Quarterly* VI, 22 (Summer 1976): 3-24. (#22)

John Burgess. "Roger Planchon's *The Black Pig* at Villeurbanne." *Theatre Quarterly* IV, 14 (May-July 1974): 56-86. (#14)

Susan Letzler Cole. *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Chapter #1: "A Hidden World"

choose any two additional chapters— one director whose work you know & one you don't

**Week 8: DOING REHEARSAL ETHNOGRAPHY**

**Assignment #1 due** - students share own experiences observing rehearsals

Gay McAuley. "Towards an ethnography of rehearsal." *New Theatre Quarterly*. (Feb. 1998) No. 1 (53):75-85

Kirsten Hastrup. "Writing ethnography: state of the art." from *Anthropology and Autobiography*, eds J. Okeley and H. Callaway. London: Routledge, 1992.

Clifford Geertz. "'From the native's point of view': On the nature of anthropological understanding." from *Meaning in Anthropology*, eds Keith Basso and Horace Selby. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press. pp. 221-237

**Week 9: INTERVIEWS**

**Final paper topics must be approved by instructor (email okay)**

Helen Manfull. *Taking the Stage: Women Directors on Directing*. London: Methuen, 1999. chapters #4-6

Paul Ryder Ryan. "The Living Theatre's 'Money Tower'." *The Drama Review* 18 (June 1974) No. 2: 9-19

**Week 10-11: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF REHEARSALS**

Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999.

Chapter #1: "Introduction: Space As Theatrical Signifier"

Chapter #4: "Space and Performance Structure"

Chapter #5: "Objects in Performance"

Barbara Hodgdon. "Rehearsal Process as Critical Practice: John Barton's 1978 *Love's Labour's Lost*." *Theatre History Studies* 8 (1988): 11-34

chose one of the remaining chapters of *Space in Performance*

**Week 12: CONTEMPORARY REHEARSAL THEORY**

Ian Maxwell, "Learning in/through crisis." *Australasian Drama Studies* 39 (October 2001): 43-57  
*About Performance* #6 (2006), special issue on rehearsal studies

**Week 13:** wrap up or catch up!  
final papers due in class (assignment #2)

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*Required Texts:*

Gay McAuley. *Space in Performance*.  
Tiffany Stern. *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*.  
Antony Sher. *Year of the King*.  
Max Stafford-Clark. *Letters to George: The Account of a Rehearsal*.  
*About Performance* (#6) special issue, available from the instructor

*Recommended Texts:*

Susan Letzler Cole. *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World*.  
Helen Manfull. *Taking the Stage: Women Directors on Directing*.

\*\*All other readings will be made available in a coursepack, and they will be posted online through the library's electronic reserve system.\*\*