Course Title
German Theater of the 20th Century: History & Practice

Course Number
GERM-UA.9290001, THEA-UT.9612001

Syllabus last updated on: 20-Jan-2016

Instructor Contact Information
Katrin Dettmer
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Course Details
Tuesdays, 3:30pm to 6:15pm
NYUB in the Kulturbrauerei, Room: “Prenzlauer Berg”

Prerequisites
None

Units earned
4

Course Description
This course examines German theater of the twentieth century, from Expressionism to contemporary postdramatic forms of writing and performance. The course will first offer an overview of German theater traditions before 1900 and will then engage in analyzing specific developments in German theater starting with Max Reinhardt and his work at the Deutsches Theater Berlin. Other case studies will focus on Brecht’s epic theater, theater during the Third Reich, postwar theater trends in East and West Germany, and current developments in reunified Germany. Not only will we closely read relevant plays and theory by the theater makers of these respective periods, but we will also explore aesthetics and performance issues as they have changed over time. As the involved practice of dramaturgy in Germany has greatly influenced theatrical developments, we will investigate this major aspect of theatrical work in Germany as a contribution to world theater and study how the extensive debate of ideas is being concretely realized in the theater through the choices being made in a production. An integral part of the course will include visits to Berlin theaters, attending performances, which we will analyze in class, and engaging in discussions with contemporary theater makers in Berlin.

Course Objective
The aim of this course is to provide an introduction to some central and formative approaches to theater theory and practice in Germany. As this course takes literary, theater historical, and performance theoretical perspectives into account, our
examination strives to open up new paths of inquiry, which will illuminate the issues at hand.

Assessment Components
Students are expected to do the readings, attend all sessions, participate in discussions, and complete written assignments. Student performance will be evaluated on the basis of four components: attendance & class participation, presentation & reading responses, a midterm essay, and a final argumentative writing assignment.

(1) Attendance & Participation  10%
(2) Class Presentation & Reading Responses  30%
(3) Writing assignment I: Midterm  20%
(4) Writing assignment II: Critical Essay  40%

(1) Participation in discussions constitutes an important component of course activities and makes up a significant portion of student grades. You will have the opportunity to further explore the course readings, seek clarification, express your views, and engage in peer discussion.

(2) In order to prepare for discussion in class, students are required to submit 10 short reading responses (250 words) before each class by uploading them to NYU Classes. These reading responses serve to develop a habit of critical engagement with the texts and regular writing practice. They can also help to identify your research interests early on. Furthermore, students will convey their negotiations of a reading by giving one in-class presentation of 10 to 15 minutes, which incorporates exemplary close readings of selected passages and the development of critical discussion questions for the seminar.

(3) The course is also writing-intensive. Students will write a mid-term paper (5 pages), based on discussion questions, which will be distributed one week before the deadline.

(4) Finally, students will write a critical essay (12 – 15 pages) on a topic of their choosing. This work can be an extension of the mid-term paper but demands argumentative writing. Please arrange to meet with me at the earliest opportunity to discuss your research interests and final project.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required component may result in failure of the class, regardless of grades achieved in other assignments.

Assessment Expectations

Grade A: The student makes excellent use of empirical and theoretical material and offers well-structured arguments in his/her work. The student writes comprehensive essays / answers to exam questions and his/her work shows strong evidence of critical thought and extensive reading.

Grade B: The candidate shows a good understanding of the problem and has demonstrated the ability to formulate and execute a coherent research strategy.
Grade C: The work is acceptable and shows a basic grasp of the research problem. However, the work fails to organize findings coherently and is in need of improvement.

Grade D: The work passes because some relevant points are made. However, there may be a problem of poor definition, lack of critical awareness, poor research.

Grade F: The work shows that the research problem is not understood; there is little or no critical awareness and the research is clearly negligible.

Grade Conversion
Your instructor may use one of the following scales of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

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\begin{align*}
B+ & = 87-89 \\
C+ & = 77-79 \\
D+ & = 67-69 \\
F & = below 65
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
A & = 94-100 \\
B & = 84-86 \\
C & = 74-76 \\
D & = 65-66 \\
A- & = 90-93 \\
B- & = 80-83 \\
C- & = 70-73
\end{align*}
\]

Alternatively:

\[
\begin{align*}
A & = 4.0 \\
A- & = 3.7 \\
B+ & = 3.3 \\
B & = 3.0 \\
B- & = 2.7 \\
C+ & = 2.3 \\
C & = 2.0 \\
C- & = 1.7 \\
D+ & = 1.3 \\
D & = 1.0 \\
F & = 0.0
\end{align*}
\]

Attendance Policy
Participation in all classes is essential for your academic success, especially in NYU Berlin’s content courses that, unlike most courses at NYU NY, meet only once per week in a double-session for three hours. Your attendance in both content and language courses is required and will be checked at each class meeting. As soon as it becomes clear that you cannot attend a class, you must inform your professor by email immediately (i.e. before the start of your class). Absences are only excused if they are due to illness, religious observance or emergencies. If you want the reasons for your absence to be treated confidentially and not shared with your professor, please approach NYUB's Director or Wellness Counselor. Your professor or NYUB's administration may ask you to present a doctor's note or an exceptional permission from the Director or Wellness Counselor. Doctor's notes need to be submitted to the Assistant Director for Academics or the Arts Coordinator, who will inform your professors.

Unexcused absences affect students' grades: In content courses each unexcused absence (equaling one week's worth of classes) leads to a deduction of 2% of the overall grade and may negatively affect your class participation grade. Three unexcused absences in one course may lead to a Fail in that course. In German Language classes two or three (consecutive or non-consecutive) unexcused absences (equaling one week's worth of classes) lead to a 2% deduction of the overall grade. Five unexcused absences in your German language course may lead to a Fail in that course. Furthermore, faculty is also entitled to deduct points for frequent late arrival to class or late arrival back from in-class breaks. Being more than 15 minutes late for
class counts as an unexcused absence. Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion.

Exams, tests, deadlines, and oral presentations that are missed due to illness always require a doctor’s note as documentation. It is the student's responsibility to produce this doctor's note; until this doctor's note is produced the missed assessment is graded with an F. In content classes, an F in one assignment may lead to failure of the entire class.

**Attendance Rules on Religious Holidays**
Members of any religious group may, without penalty, excuse themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Students who anticipate being absent because of any religious observance should notify their instructor AND NYUB’s Academic Office in writing via e-mail one week in advance before being absent for this purpose. If examinations or assignment deadlines are scheduled on the day the student will be absent, the Director or Assistant Director will re-schedule a make-up examination or extend the deadline for assignments. Please note that an absence is only excused for the holiday but not for any days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday.

**Late Submission of Work**
1. Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.

2. Late work should be submitted in person to the instructor or to the Assistant Director for Academics, who will write on the essay or other work the date and time of submission, in the presence of the student. Another member of the administrative staff may also personally accept the work, and will write the date and time of submission on the work, as above.

3. Unless an extension has been approved (with a doctor's note or by approval of the Director or Assistant Director), work submitted late receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100 point scale for each day it is late.

4. Without an approved extension, written work submitted more than 5 weekdays following the session date fails and is given a zero.

5. End of semester essays must be submitted on time.

6. Students who are late for a written exam have no automatic right to take extra time or to write the exam on another day.

7. Please remember that university computers do not keep your essays - you must save them elsewhere. Having lost parts of your essay on the university computer is no excuse for a late submission.

**Provisions for Students with Disabilities**
Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see their website (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information.

Plagiarism Policy
The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism. Proper referencing of your sources avoids plagiarism (see as one possible help the NYU library guide to referencing styles: http://nyu.libguides.com/citations).

NYUB takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. All your written work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form to the instructor. Your instructor may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor. For a summary of NYU Global's academic policies please see: www.nyu.edu/global/academic-policies

Required Texts
- Course Reader
- Electronic Resources (via NYU Classes / NYU Library)

Books can be bought at Saint Georges bookshop in Wörther Straße 27 near NYUB, where the books are pre-ordered for students. Students can re-sell their used books at the end of the semester to Saint Georges (with the exception of German language books). Additionally, one copy of each book is kept in the Reading Room of NYUB's Academic Center, for you to read in the center but not to take out.

Readers can be bought at Sprintout copy-shop (situated under the railway arches in front of Humboldt University’s main library, the Grimm-Zentrum, in Georgenstraße / Universitätstraße – S-Bahn-Bogen 190 - please allow five hours between booking and collecting readers).

Supplemental Texts (not required to purchase)
• Maik Hamburger; Simon Williams (Eds.). *A History of German Theatre*. Cambridge 2011.

**Internet Research Guidelines**
To be discussed in class.

**Additional Required Equipment**
None.

**Schedule of Topics and Readings**

**Session 1 – 2 Feb 2016: Introduction**
We will discuss the objectives and the organization of the seminar. Then we will take a look at German theater traditions before 1900 and the recurrent shifts in dramaturgical viewpoints, as we develop questions to guide us through the semester.

**1900 – 1945**

**Session 2 – 9 Feb 2016: Expressionism**
This session will focus on the development of Expressionism in the German theatre scene. Plays by Wedekind and Kokoschka will serve as the literary foundation before we investigate the role of Max Reinhardt and the Deutsches Theater Berlin for this new aesthetic.
- Frank Wedekind. *Spring Awakening* (1891/1906)
- Oskar Kokoschka. *Murderer, Hope of Women* (1909) [course reader]

**Session 3 – 16 Feb 2016: Epic Theatre**
We will discuss Bertolt Brecht’s development of Epic Theatre, taking into account the groundbreaking work by Erwin Piscator and the critical Marxist view of Walter Benjamin. We will analyze Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera* in detail.
- Bertolt Brecht. *The Threepenny Opera* (1928)
THEATER! – 16 Feb 2016: *Terror*, at Deutsches Theater
Together with the other section of the course, we will visit this new production based on a text by Ferdinand von Schirach, which is presented with English surtitles.

**Session 4 – 23 Feb 2016: Theater during the Third Reich: Conformism and Exile**
In this session, we will take a twofold look at theater practitioners during the Third Reich: those who remained in Germany and participated in theater fitting the ideology of National Socialism, like Gustaf Gründgens, and those who had to leave Germany and tried to maintain an alternative German theater in exile, like Bertolt Brecht.

- Bertolt Brecht. *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939)

**1945 - 1989**

**Session 5 – 1 Mar 2016: Zero Hour Theater**
During the immediate aftermath of World War II, artists in Germany developed an aesthetic of the “Zero Hour” or “Rubble Art”, which sought for a fresh start after the horrors of war while taking into account the various forms of destruction. We will analyze the aesthetic outlook of these works in conjunction with theories of trauma.

- Wolfgang Borchert. *The Man Outside* (1947)

**Session 6 – 8 Mar 2016: Theater in the FRG I (Documentary Theater / Theater about the Holocaust)**
With the founding of the two German nation states in 1949, two distinctive approaches to theater were also established. We will first look at the developments in West Germany and the focus on documentary theater, which shared in the national project of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (“coming to terms with the past”) regarding Third Reich, World War II, and the Holocaust. We will continue our discussion of theories of trauma as specific to theatrical forms.
THEATER! – 13 Mar 2016: Die Dreigroschenoper, at Berliner Ensemble
Together with the other section of the course, we will visit this seminal production directed by Robert Wilson, which has been on the repertory since 2007. The production is presented without surtitles.

Session 7 – 15 Mar 2016: Theater in the FRG II (Postmodern Tendencies I)
We will continue our discussion of West German theater with an investigation of the student movement of 1968 and its repercussions for the theatre as a public venue of critical engagement with the status quo. We will analyze the impact of playwright Peter Handke and director Claus Peymann on the re-shaping of the theater culture.

- Peter Handke. Kaspar (1967)

Session 8 – 22 Mar 2016: Theater in the FRG III (Postmodern Tendencies II)
As theater in West Germany increasingly deals with questions of freedom, gender, and the market place in the light of the Cold War, it also looks for alternative modes to organize itself, free of the traditional conventions of the subsidized theater. In this respect, director Peter Stein and his project of a democratic co-management at Die Schaubühne Berlin revolutionize theater practices.

- Botho Strauß. Big and Small (1978) [course reader]
Spring Break – 29 Mar 2016: no class

Session 9 – 4 Apr 2016 [Monday! in St. Agnes!]: Theater in the GDR I (Cultural Production & Socialist Realism)
In this session, we will shift our focus to the theater scene in East Germany, which in its beginnings was shaped by Bertolt Brecht and his work at the Berliner Ensemble and by the state policies regarding cultural production, the aesthetic of Socialist Realism, and a complex system of control and censorship. For the next three sessions, we engage with the work of Heiner Müller, whose varied career serves as a fascinating case study for the development of the GDR theater culture.


Session 10 – 6 Apr 2016 [Wednesday! in St. Agnes!]: Theater in the GDR II (Revolution I)
As the political climate in the GDR dictated content and form of all art, theater makers were forced to develop strategies to critically engage their audience without jeopardizing their lives, by reworking classical material, for instance. Heiner Müller also reexamined Brecht’s legacy for theater as such and thus came to develop a new perspective on Brecht’s *Lehrstücke*.


F.I.N.D. Festival at Schaubühne – 12 Apr 2016: no class

Session 11 – 19 Apr 2016: Theater in the GDR III (Revolution II)
As the system of the GDR began to fail, more and more artists left for the West. Writers like Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller remained in the GDR in order to advocate a reform of the state by exploring new and avant-garde forms of expression. We will investigate the later aesthetics of Heiner Müller, both as a playwright and a director,
whose project included to secure theater as a venue for public discourse. We will also discuss the legacy of the GDR theater culture.

- Heiner Müller. *Hamletmachine* (1977) [course reader]

1990 - 2016

Session 12 – 25 Apr 2016 [Monday! In St. Agnes!]: Postdramatic Theater

After the fall of the wall in 1989, German theater intensified its search for new forms, which would adequately represent the chaos of possibilities in a post-ideological world. Leaving traditional dramatic structures behind, playwrights, like Elfriede Jelinek, started to construct texts that would work against the institution of the theater, while directors, like Einar Schleef, sought to destabilize established ways of viewing.


Session 13 – 3 May 2016: Theater & Performance

In this session, we will examine the growing importance of physical performance for contemporary theater by looking at the work of Falk Richter, who creates and produces at Berlin’s Schaubühne. Furthermore, we will investigate how theater itself becomes the subject of theater and is scrutinized in its role as a public space. While writer and director René Pollesch evokes a meta-theater of theory and cultural critique, Frank Castorf at the Volksbühne Berlin continues his quest to destroy the status quo by destroying traditional notions of theatre. This includes, for both theater makers, an intensive use of other media on the stage.

- René Pollesch. *I Am Looking Into Your Eyes, Social Blinding Context!* (2010) [course reader]

Session 14 – 10 May 2016: Theater & Cultural Translation
As German theater seeks to become more global, questions arise with regards to cultural translatability of German theater for the global audience, as well as the integration of other voices (race, gender, class, etc.) within the German context. We will consider the artistic direction of the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin, which is the forerunner in building a diverse ensemble and devising new work out of their biographies.


Session 15 – 17 May 2016: Résumé
In our last session, we will review the milestones of this semester, as well as briefly look at the final projects.

*Final Writing Assignment Due, incl. short in-class presentation of the final project*

Classroom Etiquette
The use of cell phones in the classroom is not permitted. Laptops and tablets may only be used to refer to electronically available texts for class. Students may not eat during class, except during breaks. Drinks, including coffee and tea, are fine.

Required Co-Curricular Activities
We will visit at least four productions at theaters in Berlin, which are part of class time and thus mandatory. The reading response on dates following these theater visits may address these productions; we will also discuss the performances in class. Due to the special repertory scheduling system in German theaters, all dates are not yet set but will be made known to the class as soon as they become available. NYU Berlin will cover the ticket costs.

Suggested Co-Curricular Activities
As the theater and arts scene in Berlin is very diverse and as ticket prices are comparatively cheap when you are using your student ID at the box offices, you are encouraged to explore the Berlin theater world on your own. Please refer to the *Berlin Theater Guide* for further information.

*Your Instructor*
Katrin Dettmer is the Arts Coordinator at NYU Berlin. She received her Ph.D. in German Studies from Brown University in 2012. Since then she has taught for Brown University and Leuphana Universität Lüneburg, where she taught German Studies and Theatre Arts with a special focus on dramaturgy. In her dissertation on East-German playwright Heiner Müller, entitled *The Touch of the Dead*, Katrin negotiates the dynamics between history and performance in both Müller’s writing and his stage work. Her research focuses on 20th and 21st century German literature; GDR literature and intellectual life; literatures of trauma, memory, and remembrance; Theater and Performance Studies; Media Studies; intellectual history; and aesthetics of presence. In addition to her academic work, Katrin has also been working as a dramaturg for a variety of productions, both in the US and in Germany. Her newest production in cooperation with *lunatiks produktion* and Theater Lüneburg, *Senkungen*, is a devised piece based on extensive regional research and will have its world premiere in Lüneburg in February 2016.