



## CONTEMPORARY THEATRE IN ENGLISH

### WORKSHEET 1 – CONTEMPORARY PARADIGMS: RADICAL DRAMA/POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE

#### I. Radical Drama

Read Samuel Beckett's *Breath* (1969), a paradigmatic 'radical' text, and answer the following questionnaire (<<http://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/handle/2445/13623>>), commenting on the text's meanings and effects.

Now read Elaine Aston and George Savona's description of the characteristics of radical drama in their book *Theatre as Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (1991) and answer the following questions:

1. What different phases of theatre do they identify in history and which periods do they cover? Which dramaturgic elements do they use as signposts for their study?
2. How does dramatic shape work in radical drama and what are its implications? How does its use differ from the one followed by bourgeois drama? Consider also the use of time and discuss its possible meanings in both modes of representation.
3. How is character conceived in radical drama and what are its implications? How does a radical approach to character differ from a bourgeois one and which performance modes of representation are used in each case? What major figures in theatre history are related to each of them and how do they see the role of the actor and the function of theatre?
4. Watch the clip from Katie Mitchell and Leo Warner's multiscreen video installation *Five Truths* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2011) and compare the rendering of Ophelia's madness and death in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* through Stanislavskian and Brechtian acting styles. What dramaturgical strategies are used in each specific case? What are the main differences between the two performances?
5. What is the function of dialogue in radical drama and what are its implications? How does its use differ from the one followed by bourgeois drama? Watch Harold Pinter's *Apart from That* (BBC Newsnight, 2006) and comment on the play's radical use of dialogue.
6. What is the function of stage directions in radical drama and what are their implications? How does their use differ from the one followed by bourgeois drama?

7. How does the stage picture work in radical drama and what are its implications? How does its use differ from the one followed by bourgeois drama?

8. What are the aesthetics of performance like in radical drama (i.e. its strategies of defamiliarisation) and what function does the spectator fulfil? On the whole, what are the intended effects and socio-political underpinnings of radical drama?

9. Watch Damien Hirst's version of *Breath in Beckett on Film* (2001) and comment on the specific dramaturgical choices made by the director, on their significance and effects.

## II. Postdramatic Theatre

Read Hans-Thies Lehmann's description of the characteristics of postdramatic theatre in his book *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006) and answer the following questions:

1. Which different theatrical modes does Lehmann identify in his study and which periods do they cover? What are the main distinctions that he establishes between both?

2. Watch excerpts from DV8's *The Cost of Living* (2004); Jan Lauwers's *The Lobster Shop* (2006); Sonia Gómez's *Experiencias con un desconocido* (2007, 2009), and/or others suggested by the teacher and analyse the presence and significance of radical/postdramatic elements.

3. What are the connections/similarities/differences between the different theatrical modes discussed so far (bourgeois, radical, dramatic, postdramatic)? What are the advantages/limitations of the different paradigms?

4. Group the following terms into the radical/postdramatic or bourgeois/dramatic paradigm: analogy, foregrounding, representation, anti-illusionistic aesthetic, illusion of wholeness, distancing, anti-naturalistic aesthetic, drawing-room comedy, transcending logocentrism, catharsis, 'making strange', theatricality, Bertolt Brecht, fictional construct, naturalism, emotional identification, defamiliarisation, self-referentiality, fragmentation, fourth wall, unsettled spectator, illusion of reality, disjointed narrative, teleology, formal experimentation, progress, self-awareness, re-presentation, mimesis, devaluation of language, deconstruction, dialectics, Konstantin Stanislavsky, 'well-made' play, stable meaning, stage picture as symbol/metaphor, realism, alienation, detachment, imitation, logocentrism, social bond, psychological depth, self-reflexivity, empathy, self-interrogation, totality, logic, disorienting subject, performance/performativity, destabilising meaning, active spectator, illusionism, affective recognition, defamiliarisation of language.

## Reference List

Aston, E. and Savona, G. (1991). *Theatre as Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (pp. 15-20, 31-33, 34-36, 46-48, 51-53, 65-70 & 91-95). London and New York: Routledge.

Lehmann, H.T. (2006). *Postdramatic Theatre*. (K. Jürs-Munby, Trans.) (pp. 16-28). London and New York: Routledge.

Monforte, E., Hurtley, J. and Phillips, B. (2010). Samuel Beckett, *Breath* (1969). In *Reading and Writing Skills for Students of Literature in English*. Barcelona: Dipòsit Digital de la Universitat de Barcelona. Retrieved from <http://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/handle/2445/13623>

### Visual Material

DV8 Physical Theatre. (2004). *The Cost of Living*. United Kingdom: DV8 Films, Channel 4.

Gómez, S. (2007, 2011). *Experiencias con un desconocido*. Mercat de les Flors, Barcelona.

Hirst, D. [Director]. (2001). *Breath*. In *Beckett on Film*. Germany, Ireland, United Kingdom: Blue Angel Films, Tyrone Productions, Radio Telefís Éireann, Channel 4, Board Scannán Na hÉireann.

Lauwers, J. (2006). *The Lobster Shop*. Needcompany, Brussels.

Mitchell, K. and Warner, L. [Directors]. (2011). *Five Truths*. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Pinter, H. (2006). *Apart from That* [Television broadcast]. London: BBC Newsnight.