

**THR 508: FUNDAMENTALS OF DIRECTING**

**THR 609: PLAY DIRECTING**

Tuesday/Thursday: 9:00-10:50

Murphy Hall 209

Dr. Peter Zazzali

Office Hours: T/W from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The director, as we understand the role today, is a relatively new phenomenon in the history of theatre. Only about 150 years old, the director has been identified as everything from a company manager and producer to an auteur, visionary, and collaborator. The director is responsible for setting a creative path for an ensemble of artists as he/she is the leader of a given production. It falls to the director, therefore, to know the most about the work being produced. She must be as thorough in her research as she is clear in her communication. Like acting, directing requires an enormous amount of trust and clarity. Her actors and designers must clearly understand her vision and then trust in it. In short, the director is the inspiring force behind any worthwhile work of theatre. Thus, clarity, focus, and vision are the guiding principles that define his/her work.

This class will emphasize the collaborative nature of theatre, with the director assuming responsibility for synthesizing the creative elements of a piece. Students will explore a wide variety of performance styles through a pair (**3 for THR 609**) of directing projects. We will address practical matters such as casting, staging, text analysis, the design process, and communication with actors. Students will workshop scenes in class and give short presentations as part of articulating a vision for a given theatrical piece. There will also be numerous readings and low/high stakes writing assignments, all of which examine the history and practice of the director's craft; these readings should be seen as a supplement to the practical elements of our directing lab. Ultimately, you will leave the class having a clear idea of the director's work and how to go about it.

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**COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of the course you will be able to:

- Analyze and breakdown a text in preparation for rehearsals, production meetings, and crafting an overall aesthetic vision
- Develop, articulate, and execute an artistic vision for a piece
- Effectively communicate with a team of designers
- Effectively work with actors
- Learn the basic principles of stagecraft (blocking)

- Demonstrate critical thinking, interpretation skills, and collaboration in addressing artistic challenges
- Learn the history of stage directing by examining the oeuvre of numerous proven professionals
- Understand the important connection between theory and practice in making theatre
- Gain confidence in being the creative leader of a theatrical project
- Demonstrate fundamentals of composition and blocking, communicate aesthetic ideas, and collaborate with artistic colleagues.

## COURSE TEXTS

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**At the Bookstore:** Robert Benedetti. *The Director at Work* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1985); Shomit Mitter and Maria Shevtsova, eds. *Fifty Key Theatre Directors* (NY: Routledge, 2005). Other readings and assignments will be available on Blackboard (BB).

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

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**Attendance and Participation:** Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. You must be on time and prepared for all classes. If you fail to show up on a day you are scheduled to present scene work, you forfeit the opportunity to workshop your piece and lose credit for the assignment. Furthermore, any absence in excess of two will result in a reduction of your final grade.

This is an ensemble-oriented course that requires everyone's mutual support. You will be assisting one another's projects by acting in scenes, as well as offering constructive feedback within the framework of our laboratory-styled learning environment. This means that you must be prepared and active in your participation each and every class.

**Professional Decorum:** The nature of this directing laboratory requires that we demonstrate mutual respect and support to one another. Please be sure to turn off cellphones before entering class. Also, there is no eating or drinking during class (water is allowed), and "side-bar" discussions are frowned upon. When classmates are presenting their work they deserve our full support, encouragement, and attention. Adherence to these criteria will count towards your participation grade.

**Presentations/Directing Projects:** You will complete two performance projects [**3 for THR 609**] that entails studying a text and then "work-shopping" one of its scenes in class. You will present each scene twice, which will require substantial rehearsing outside class hours. At the time of your first presentation for each project, you will submit a 1-2 page analysis that explains your directorial vision for the text, including a breakdown of the scene you are presenting. Specific guidelines for the performance projects and text analysis paper will be furnished.

**Readings and Low Stakes Writing:** As you can see by the class schedule, there are numerous reading assignments for the course. You are expected to be prepared to actively discuss these texts in class on their respective due dates. Throughout the term

you will also be responsible for participating in discussions on Blackboard to support our coverage of the course readings. This process will be facilitated by prompts that I will post no later than Friday (12:00 PM) of any given week, thereby providing you ample time to formulate a thoughtful and relevant response by the due date: 12:00 PM the following Monday. You are likewise responsible for reading the responses of your peers, an activity that will support our in-class discussions.

**Rehearsal Observation Reports:** Watching a professional at work is one of the best ways to learn the director's craft. Therefore, all **THR 508** students are required to attend a full rehearsal of a KU production this term and to then draft a report (2-3 pp.) documenting their observations. Specific guidelines for this assignment will be provided. **DUE DATE:** on or before **DECEMBER 3**

**Investigating a Director Paper:** You will research and write a 5-6-page paper [**8-10 pp. for THR 609**] on the career and aesthetic style of a theatre director or choreographer (e.g., Pina Bausch). The objective of this exercise is to give you the opportunity to trace the oeuvre of an individual whose work you admire, and to thus identify his/her process, artistic identity, and position in theatre history (assignment guidelines will be provided). Please confirm your subject with me at least a month in advance of the due date: **NOVEMBER 19**

**Final Exam:** The **THR 508** students will take a final exam for the course to test your knowledge of both the director's work and his/her role in theatre history. An appropriate amount of class time will be taken to review for the exam. Please consult the KU registrar's website to access the exam schedule.

#### GRADING BREAKDOWN\*

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##### **THR 508**

|  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| <b>Participation/Attendance:</b>       | 100 points            |
| <b>Text Analyses (2):</b>              | 100 points (50 each)  |
| <b>Investigating a Director Paper:</b> | 100 points            |
| <b>Low Stakes Writing (6):</b>         | 150 points (25 each)  |
| <b>Rehearsal Observation:</b>          | 50 points             |
| <b>Projects (2):</b>                   | 400 points (200 each) |
| <b>Final Exam:</b>                     | 100 points            |
|  | <u>1000 points</u>    |

##### **THR 609**

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|--|-----------------------|
| <b>Participation/Attendance:</b>       | 100 points            |
| <b>Text Analyses (2):</b>              | 50 points (25 each)   |
| <b>Investigating a Director Paper:</b> | 100 points            |
| <b>Low Stakes Writing (6):</b>         | 150 points (25 each)  |
| <b>Projects (3):</b>                   | 600 points (200 each) |
|  | <u>1000 points</u>    |

**Grading Ranges:** A=900-1000/ B=800-899/ C=700-799/ D=600-699. Please note that your final score will be adjusted for excessive absence, tardiness, and other matters relative to your work in the course.

## INSTRUCTOR POLICIES

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- I encourage you to visit during my office hours (T/W 11:00-12:30) or by requesting an appointment.
- I am always available by email and promise to respond to your messages within 48 hours.
- Acceptance of late assignments is at my discretion, and if accepted, your grade will be penalized.
- KU Accessibility Resources (<http://www.disability.ku.edu>) coordinates accommodations and services for our students. If you have a disability for which you may request an accommodation, please contact AR as soon as possible.
- Any written work you submit must be your own. Plagiarism is in serious breach of academic honesty and will be treated according to KU policy, see [http://www.writing.ku.edu/~writing/instructors/guides/plagiarism\\_guidelines.sh](http://www.writing.ku.edu/~writing/instructors/guides/plagiarism_guidelines.sh); also <http://www.studenthandbook.ku.edu/>

## CLASS SCHEDULE

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Tuesday, August 27 (1)

**Class Topic**

Course introduction and review of syllabus

Thursday, August 29 (2)

**Class Topic**

How a director thinks, what she does, and how she works

**Assignment Due Today**

Benedetti, 3-24 (Part One); Clurman, *On Directing*, “The Director’s Theatre” (BB)

Tuesday, September 3 (3)

**Class Topic**

Encountering and researching the text towards forming a directorial vision

**Assignment Due Today**

Benedetti, 27-35, “The First Encounter”; Clurman, *On Directing*, “Reading the Script” (BB); Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* (BB)

Thursday, September 5 (4)

**Class Topic**

Understanding text analysis; identifying the shape of the drama; dramaturgical analysis of *The Glass Menagerie*; Assign Project #1 to THR 609 students

**Assignment Due Today**

Benedetti, 36-51, "Understanding the Action," "Shaping the Drama"; David Ball, *Backwards and Forwards* (BB)

Tuesday, September 10 (5)

**Class Topic**

Understanding the function of characters; **Begin presenting Project #1**

**Assignment Due Today**

Benedetti, 52-60, "Understanding Character"; Project #1

Thursday, September 12 (6)

**Class Topic**

Creating the world of the play and utilizing a ground plan; Project #1

**Assignment Due Today**

Benedetti, 66-70 "The Landscape of the Play" and "Preparing the Ground Plan"; Project #1

Tuesday, September 17 (7)

**Class Topic**

Exploring the dramatic action in practice; How to organize rehearsing the play; Project #1

**Assignment Due Today**

Benedetti, 125-135, "Exploring Action"; Project #1

Thursday, September 19 (8)

**Class Topic**

Understanding staging; Project #1; Assign Project #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Benedetti, 145-151, "Early Staging" (start of chapter through "The Stage Manager"); **Finish Project #1**

Tuesday, September 24 (9)

**Class Topic**

Dramaturgical analysis of *Proof*

**Assignment Due Today**

Auburn, *Proof* (BB)

Thursday, September 26 (10)

**Class Topic**

Casting and Auditioning; **Begin Presenting Project #2**

**Assignment Due Today**

Benedetti, 86-108, "Casting"; Project #2

Tuesday, October 1 (11)

**Class Topic**

Finding a Directorial Vision; Project #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Benedetti, pp. 61-62, introduction to “Forming a Production Concept”; “Conversation with Declan Donnellan,” in *Directors/Directing* (BB); Project #2

Thursday, October 3 (12)

**Class Topic**

Understanding how to approach a given dramatic style; Project #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Saint-Denis, *The Rediscovery of Style* (BB); Project #2

Tuesday, October 8 (13)

**Class Topic**

Working with designers; Project #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Benedetti, pp. 75-85, “The Design Process”; (Guest instructor: TBD); Project #2

Thursday, October 10 (14)

**Class Topic**

Working with actors; Project #2

**Assignment Due Today**

William Ball, *A Sense of Direction*, “Relation to Actors” (BB); Gorchakov, *Stanislavsky Directs* (BB); Project #2

Thursday, October 17 (15)

**Class Topic**

Project #2; Project #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Project #2

Tuesday, October 22 (16)

**Class Topic**

Creating the mise en scene; Using music in directing; Project #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Tairov, *Notes of a Director* (BB); Project #2

Thursday, October 24 (17)

**Class Topic**

Project #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Project #2

Tuesday, October 29 (18)

**Class Topic**

Overviewing the Director’s Process; Project #2

**Assignment Due Today**

William Ball, *A Sense of Direction*, “The Rehearsal Process” (BB); Project #2

Thursday, October 31 (19)

**Class Topic**

Project #2; Assign Project #3

**Assignment Due Today**

**Finish Project #2**

Tuesday, November 5 (20)

**Class Topic**

Focus on a Director: Constantine Stanislavsky; **Begin presenting Project #3**

**Assignment Due Today**

*Fifty Key Directors*, pp. 11-16; Gorchakov, *Stanislavsky Directs* (BB); Project #3

Thursday, November 7 (21)

**Class Topic**

Focus on a Director: Bertolt Brecht; Project #3

**Assignment Due Today**

Brecht, “A Short Organum for the Theatre” in *Brecht On Theatre* (BB); Weber, “Brecht As Director” (BB); *Fifty Key Theatre Directors*, pp. 52-56; Project #3

Tuesday, November 12 (22)

**Class Topic**

Focus on a Director: Vsevolod Meyerhold; Project #3

**Assignment Due Today**

Law and Gordon, *Meyerhold, Eisenstein, and Biomechanics*; Zazzali, “Did Meyerhold Influence Brecht?” (BB); *Fifty Key Theatre Directors*, pp. 26-31; Project #3

Thursday, November 14 (23)

**Class Topic**

Focus on a Director: Anne Bogart; Project #3

**Assignment Due Today**

Bogart, *A Director Prepares* (BB); *Fifty Key Theatre Directors*, pp. 217-222; Project #3

Tuesday, November 19 (24)

**Class Topic**

Focus on a Director: Tadashi Suzuki; Project #3

**Assignment Due Today**

Suzuki, “The Toga Festival” in *The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki* (BB); *Fifty Key Theatre Directors*, pp. 167-172; Project #3; **DIRECTOR PAPER DUE**

Thursday, November 21 (25)

**Class Topic**

Project #3

**Assignment Due Today**

Project #3

Tuesday, November 26 (26)

**Class Topic**

Focus on a Director: Robert Wilson; Project #3

**Assignment Due Today**

Abramovic, *Robert Wilson From Within* (BB); *Fifty Key Theatre Directors*, 185-190;  
Project #3

Tuesday, December 3 (27)

**Class Topic**

Focus on a Director: Dan Sullivan; Project #3

**Assignment Due Today**

“Pam Mackinnon interview of Dan Sullivan,” in *SDC Journal* (CP); Project #3;

**REHEARSAL OBSERVATION REPORTS DUE**

Thursday, December 5 (28)

**Class Topic**

Project #3

**Assignment Due Today**

Project #3

Tuesday, December 10 (29)

**Class Topic**

Project #3

**Assignment Due Today**

Project #3

Thursday, December 12 (30)

**Class Topic**

Project #3

**Assignment Due Today**

**Finish Project #3**

**FINAL EXAM:** Check the registrar’s site