# COL5016H /DRA3904H/ DRM 420F

**ART and POLITICS: Bertolt Brecht, Robert Wilson, Robert Lepage**

## 2023 Fall

**Instructor: Professor Pia Kleber Time: Monday, 10am to 1pm.**

**Location: Robarts Library, Media Commons, Room RL 3025 TAs:**

**Office Hours: Wednesday, 2 to 4pm or by appointment. Email:** [**pia.kleber@utoronto.ca**](mailto:pia.kleber@utoronto.ca)

This course examines influences of Bertolt Brecht’s theories and practices on the productions of two international 20th century directors.

**Bertolt Brecht** played a specific role in the paradigm shift of the art which began at the end of the 19th century. He advanced this change by trying to connect art to its social and political functions and structure with the positive acceptance of the industrial revolution and by trying to transform it with the help of the new technological media.

**Robert Wilson,** the American artist and director revolutionized like Brecht theatre in the 20th century by inventing another mode of communication. What happens when Wilson directs Brecht?

**Robert Lepage,** actor and director from Quebec, presents us with another shift in how we relate to the world around us, and to the arts which that world fosters.

**The goals of this course are:**

1. to study productions directed by Bertolt Brecht, Robert Wilson and Robert Lepage and to introduce students to Brecht’s theory and demonstrate how he connected art and politics.
2. to see if Wilson and Lepage follow in Brecht’s footsteps or if and how they deviate from his concepts.

# Organization

The format of this year’s course varies according to the topic under discussion. It will consist of lectures, seminars, practical presentations, videos and some written components.

Graduate and undergraduate students, via their respective course codes, will participate in the class together. Graduate students will have additional readings and assignments, and their grades will be calculated differently.

### Assignments and Evaluations—Undergraduates Participation 15%

Participation and attendance are a base condition for the course. Every student will attend

every class, will discuss ideas openly, will take creative risks, will listen to each other intelligently, and will serve each other as colleagues.

Any unexcused absence will deduct two points from your participation grade. A full mark will also require regular comments and constructive feedback towards others’ creative work.

### Quercus posts 25%

……Students will be expected to:

1. Post an answer to discussion questions due on Sept. 25th, Oct. 130h and Nov. 27th by 11:59 pm EST; comment on 2 of the students’ answers for each discussion question, within one week after they are posted; respond to any comments your fellow students may have posted on your original post (further discussion is encouraged).

### Performances 25%

1. Present group presentations (four students per group) presentations will be held on Oct.2nd, Oct. 30th and Dec.4th.

### Video evaluation 10%

1. Submit a one-page evaluation about one of the videos studied in class.

### Final: reflection paper 25%

Every student will write a reflection paper of 1 500 words exploring how the videos, practical presentations and discussions responded to course themes, and where they think the materials covered could expand or be changed.

### Assignments and Evaluations-- Graduates Participation 10%

In addition to the standards outlined above, graduate students will be expected to prepare notes on their graduate readings for each class so that they can quickly summarize their reading for the undergraduate cohort. We will call on grads throughout to give background and context to our seminar-style conversations via these summaries of their reading. Focus on important, relevant lessons that can be made vivid and exciting in conversation – think as you read about how to best teach this text.

### Short essays 40%

Grad students will write four short essays throughout the term, responding to weeks of their choice. These essays should be submitted in the week *after* the relevant conversation, reflection both on the readings, videos and practical session associated with them.

Each essay should fill one page with single spaced. 12-point font type. The top two lines should name the week they are responding to: including no further prefatory material

. Nothing more or significantly less than one page is permitted.

### Performances 25%

See above.

### Final: reflection paper 25%

See above. The expectations for graduate reflection papers are the same as for the undergraduates.

**Students will be expected to hand in all their work on time. There will be a 5% deduction from the mark for every late day, and after 10 days assignments will no longer be accepted unless accompanied by a medical certificate.**

# Plays

Brecht, Bertolt: *The Mother*

*The Threepenny Opera*

*Mother Courage and Her Children The Good Person of Szechwan*

Georg Buechner: *Woyzeck*

Gay, John: *The Beggar’s Opera*

Shakespeare*: Hamlet*

### DVDs

DVDs: Brecht: *Mother Courage,* directed by Bertolt Brecht

*The Mother,* directed by Peter Stein DVDs directed by Wilson: *Einstein on the Beach*

*Hamlet: A Monologue*

*The Making of a Monologue: Robert Wilson The Threepenny Opera*

*Woyzeck*

DVDs directed by Robert Lepage: *Elsinore*

*The Busker’s Opera*

*Needles and Opium1*

*Needles and Opium, 2*

*887*

The DVDs will be put on Quercus.

### 30th Class presentation of:

Bertolt Brecht. “The Street Scene: A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre.” Directed à la Robert Wilson

### IMPORTANT:

Professor Kleber expects students to work with the following up-to-date tools:

**Quercus** and its applications (reading, writing, uploading and downloading of files). All course materials and information will be posted on Quercus. It is the student’s responsibility to check Quercus frequently and remain up to date on all postings.

**RefWorks** (U of T’s bibliography manager)

**MLA** citation style for essays

### Course reader

The course reader will be provided either as e-resources or as Pdf files on our Quercus platform. Make sure you installed the free Adobe reader software on your computer.

**Copyright and privacy:** Course videos and materials belong to your instructor, the University, and/or other sources depending on the specific facts of each situation, and are protected by copyright. Do not download, copy, or share any course or student materials or videos without the explicit permission of the instructor. For questions about recording and use of videos in which you appear please contact your instructor.

Students may not create audio recordings of classes with the exception of those students requiring an accommodation for a disability, who should speak to the instructor prior to beginning to record lectures.

Students creating unauthorized audio recording of lectures violate an instructor’s intellectual property rights and the Canadian Copyright Act. Students violating this agreement will be subject to disciplinary actions under the Code of Student Conduct.

Course videos may not be reproduced or posted or shared anywhere other than the official course Quercus site and should only be used by students currently registered in the course. Recordings may be saved to students’ laptop for personal use.

**Note that the University of Toronto has a strict policy on plagiarism.** Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and will be penalized according to the University’s *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters.* When in doubt contact your instructor.

# Tentative Timetable

**September 11th** Introduction to course and Bertolt Brecht

**September 18st** Bertolt Brecht’s Theory and Practice Read:

Bertolt Brecht. “The *Verfremdung* Effect in Chinese Acting” Bertolt Brecht. “A Short Organum for the Theatre”

Walter Benjamin. “What is Epic Theatre?” [ First Version]

… Bertolt Brecht. “The Street Scene: A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre.”

(DVD: *Mother Courage,* directed by Bertolt Brecht) (DVD: *The Mother*, directed by Peter Stein)

Graduate Students:

Mladen Dolar. “Shifting the Veil.” *South Atlantic Quarterly*

**September 25th**Continuation: Brecht’s Theory and Practice

**October 2nd** Two class presentations of:

Bertolt Brecht. “The Street Scene: A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre.” Directed à la Brecht’s theory.

### October 9th No class, Thanksgiving

**October 16th** Introduction to Robert Wilson

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Wilson’s talk to our class

Watch: *Einstein on the Beach*

### October 23rd

Wilson’s productions of Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera*

Read: Bertolt Brecht**.** *The Threepenny Opera*

“The Threepenny Opera. Drawings.” Performing Arts Journal

Do research on Wilson’s production of *Theepenny* Opera at the Berliner Ensemble DVD: *Die Dreigroschen Oper*, directed by Robert Wilson

DVD: *Hamlet: A Monologue, directed by Robert Wilson*

DVD: Documentary: *The Making of a Monologue*

### October 30th Class presentation of:

Bertolt Brecht. “The Street Scene: A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre.” Directed à la Robert Wilson

**November 6th No Class: Reading Week Nov. 6th -10th**

**November 13th** Introduction to Robert Lepage

Read: John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*

“Two Operas for Beggars: A Political Reading” by Richard J. Salmon

DVDs: various excerpts of Lepage productions.

DVDs: *Needles & Opium 1*

*Needles & Opium 2*

**November 20th** Lepage’s production *of The Busker’s Opera*

**November 27th** Lepage’s production of *Elsinore*

Lepage’s Production of *887*

### December 4th Class presentation of:

Bertolt Brecht. “The Street Scene: A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre.” Directed à la Robert Lepage

Summary

Barthes, Roland, *Essais critiques*, Paris: Seuil, 1964.

## Benjamin, Walter, “A Study on Brecht: What is Epic Theatre?” in

*Understanding Brecht*, trans. by Anna Bostock. New York: Verso, 1998.

Bentley, Eric, *The Brecht Commentaries*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1981. Brecht, Bertolt, *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. by John Willett, London: Methuen, 1964.

## Brecht, Bertolt, “A Street Scene. A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre”. “A Short Organum for the Theatre”.

, “Against George Lukacs*”. Aesthetics and Politics.*

Dolar, Mladen, “Lifting the Veil.” *South Atlantic Quaterly.*

## Dort, Bernard. Lecture de Brecht. Paris: Seuil, 1960.

Jameson, Fredric, *Brecht and Method*. London, New York: Verso, 1998. Kleber, Pia, *Exceptions and Rules: Brecht, Planchon and 'The Good Person of*

## *Szechwan'*. Frankfurt a.M., Bern, New York: Peter Lang, 1987.

Kleber, Pia and Visser, Colin, (eds.), *Re-Interpreting Brecht: His Influence on Contemporary Drama and Film*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

## Schall, Ekkehard, “Vasa Seminar:Bergen 1974”, from *The Craft of Theatre*, trans. by Jack Davis. London: Methuen Drama, 2008.

Willett, John, *Brecht in Context: Comparative Approaches*. London: Methuen, 1984.

Wright, Elizabeth, *Postmodern Brecht. A Re-Presentation*. London, New York: Routledge, 1989.

**ROBERT LEPAGE**

## Charest, Rémy, Robert Lepage, Connecting Flights. Toronto: Alfred A.

Knopf Canada, 1998.

Donohoe Jr. Joseph & Koustas, Jane M., *Theater sans frontiers, essays on the Dramatic Universe of Robert Lepage*. Michigan: State University Press, 2000.

## Dundjerovic, Aleksandar Sasa, *Robert Lepage.* London/New York: Routledge Performance Practitioners, 2009.

Dundjerovic, Aleksandar Sasa, *The Theatricality of Robert Lepage*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University press, 2007.

Fouquet Ludovic, Mullins, Rhonda, *The Visual laboratory of Robert Lepage*, trans. by Rhonda Mullins. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2014.

Lavender, Andy, *Hamlet in Pieces. Shakespeare reworked by Brook, Lepage, Wilson*. London: Nick Hern Books Ltd., 2001

Robert Lepage & Marie Brassard, Polygraph, trans. by Gyllian Raby, London: Methuen Modern Plays, 1997.

**ROBERT WILSON**

[Carmen Pardo](https://www.chapters.indigo.ca/en-ca/books/contributor/editor/carmen-pardo), [Miguel Morey](https://www.chapters.indigo.ca/en-ca/books/contributor/editor/miguel-morey), eds., *Robert Wilson*, Barcelona: Poligrafa, 2003. Frédéric Maurin, *Robert Wilson, Le Temps Pour Voir, L’espace pour Ecouter*.

## France: Actes Sud, 2010.

Katharina Otto-Bernstein, *Absolute Wilson, The Biography*, Munich, Bern, London, New York: Prestel Verlag, 2006.

Laurence Shyer, *Robert Wilson and his Collaborators*, New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1989.

Pia Kleber**, “***Hamlet:* One-on-One. Robert Wilson and Robert Lepage”, in *Figures du monologue théâtral*, edited by Irène Roy, Québec: Editions Nota Bene, February 2007. pp.109-117.

Stefan Brecht, *The Theatre of Visions: Robert Wilson*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978.