

Postcolonial Drama: Engaging History, Unearthing Magic
2010

Professor Leslie Katz
Office Hours: F 11:30-1 in UC 356

Course Description

Postcolonialism engages with and seeks to dismantle the assumptions, discourses, and power structures of colonialism. This course begins with a hypothesis borrowed from Michael Taussig: that one of colonialism's principal legacies is the assumption that history shows things 'as they really were.' However, as Taussig writes in *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, the issue is 'not whether facts are real but what the politics of their interpretation and representation are.' We will look at the political contexts in which playwrights and performers have implemented (and reinvented) the theater as both an anti-colonial and decolonizing tool. Finally, through analysis of actual political speeches, we will examine the power of performance, whether to quell unrest, galvanize support, or spur resistance.

Covering a range of plays from Europe, North America, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean, we will examine the reemergence of precolonial forms--such as mask, ritual, effigy--and the use to which these forms have been put both dramatically and politically, from the anti-establishment 'primitivism' of Artaud and Jarry, to the proletariat theater of Kateb Yacine, to the ritual healing plays of Sony Labou Tansi. In particular, we will explore the role of myth and magic in justifying the violence of history, as well as repairing its consequences.

Course Requirements

Participation	15%
Presentation	35%
Final paper (15-20 pp)	50%

Course Outline

January 6	Introduction
January 13	Deconstructing Historiography Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" in <i>Selected Subaltern Studies</i> Shakespeare, <i>Tempest</i> Cesaire, <i>A Tempest</i>
January 20	Decolonization: 'A program of complete disorder' Horne, <i>Savage War of Peace</i> (selections) Pontecorvo, <i>Battle of Algiers</i> (in-class selections)
January 27	Decolonization: Historical Process; Tabula Rasa; Creation of New Men

Fanon, 'Concerning Violence' in *The Wretched of the Earth*
Genet, *The Screens*
Rouch, *Les Maitres Fous* (in-class screening)

February 3 **Surrealism and Sovereignty**

Mbembe, 'Of Commandement' in *On the Postcolony*
Jarry, *Ubu Rex*
Soyinka, *King Baabu*

February 10 **Political Magic I**

Selection of political speeches: justifications of authority; use of excessive power
Group Performance

February 17 Reading Week

February 24 **Terror and the Uncanny**

Stoller, 'Beyond the grave: History, memory and death in postcolonial
Zaire/Congo' in *Memory and the postcolony*
Sony Labou Tansi, *Parenthesis of Blood*

March 3: **Unnatural Natural: Peasants and subalterns**

Taussig, 'Fetishism and Dialectical Deconstruction' and 'Devil and Commodity
Fetishism' in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism*
Yacine, *Intelligence Powder*

March 10 **Miraculous Nature of Reality**

Taussig, 'Las Tres Potencias' and 'The Wild Woman of the Forest' in *Shamanism,
Colonialism, and the Wild Man*
Quayson, 'Fecundities of the Unexpected: Magical Realism, Narrative, and History'
Highway, *Rez Sisters*

March 17 **Humbuggery and Healing**

Taussig, 'Viscerality, Faith, and Skepticism: Another Theory of Magic' in *In Near
Ruins*
Hecht, Simone, 'Tricksters' in *Invisible Governance*

March 24 **History as Sorcery: Messianic Views**

Katz, 'Engagement Cru'
Sony Labou Tansi, *Shot of Old Man*

March 31

Political Magic II

Selection of political speeches: protest and resistance

Group Performance

April 7

Wrap Up and Potlatch