

TH258-30 Post-War British Theatre and Social Abjection

23/24

Department

SCAPVC - Theatre and Performance Studies

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

Nadine Holdsworth

Credit value

30

Module duration

18 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module will address the social/political framing and theatrical engagement with a range of topics and groups of people in society that have been at the forefront of contemporary debates about how the nation, national life and national citizenship are currently conceived, imagined and represented. These topics/people include: the creation of the 'chav'/'undeserving poor'; migrants; the north/south divide; Gypsy, Travellers and Roma communities; riots and rioters; those experiencing homelessness and members of Black and global majority communities. As such, the module will address many issues informing contemporary political debates such as the 'migration/boat crisis'; ideas of 'levelling up', Black Lives Matter and concerns over the rapidly rising presence of visible and hidden homelessness. The module will question how and why playwrights, theatre-makers and performance companies have engaged with and responded to these issues as forms of political intervention and commentary. Whilst the module has a focus on twenty-first century anxieties I am also keen to take a longer historical perspective to explore how their origins can be traced to legacies of empire, colonialism, post-war reconstruction and long-standing concerns with class, regionalism and race in Britain.

The module will highlight the ways in which theatrical practice has contributed to national debate by creating alternatives to dominant narratives and images of social abjection/stigmatization

evident in political campaigns, media discourse and popular debate. This approach functions in recognition of Jacques Rancière's call to generate moments of dissensus in the perceptual and aesthetic field, 'a fresh sphere of visibility', which effectively serves to question the logics of othering, marginalization and social abjection. Hence, the module will explore how theatre and theatricality has played a part in reframing events through its storying of issues as a way to trouble reductive perceptual framing and to insert a counter-mediation in the public sphere. The module will address a range of different theatrical contexts and forms from large-scale plays for major theatres, to smaller-scale community pieces that encompass various styles including musicals, dance theatre, verbatim and monologues.

Module aims

- To examine what is meant by the concept of 'social abjection' and how social abjection is generated, maintained and experienced in society.
- To explore how theatrical practice has contributed to national debate by creating alternatives to dominant narratives and images of stigmatization evident in political campaigns, media discourse and popular debate.
- To consider how theatre and theatricality has played a part in reframing narratives through its storying and representation of issues.
- To address a range of different theatrical contexts and forms from large-scale plays for major theatres, to smaller-scale community pieces that encompass various styles including musicals, verbatim and monologues.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1 (autumn): Introduction: National Objects

This introductory session will outline the concepts, ideas and debates underpinning the module.

Weeks 2-3 (autumn): National Implosion/Riotous Behaviours

The module will look at how dominant political assessments and media treatments of riots generally focus on dysfunctional families, poor or absent parenting, lawlessness, immigration, racial antagonism, lack of aspiration and blame disaffected youth derived from the multi-ethnic so-called 'underclass'. We will look at various theatrical responses to riots including Trevor Griffith's *Oi for England* (1982); Bryony Lavery's *Goliath* (1997), Gillian Slovo's *The Riots* (2011) and Alecky Blythe's *Little Revolution* (2014) to explore how they offer more nuanced interpretations of the underlying causes and aftermaths of riots.

Weeks 3-5 (autumn): No Fixed Abode This part of the module will look at various cultural responses to homelessness in Britain. We will start by considering the ground-breaking 1966 play/film of *Cathy Come Home*, which is widely credited with bringing the tragedy of homelessness to public consciousness in tandem with the foundation of the charity Shelter and Ali Taylor's *Cathy*, which reinterpreted *Cathy Come Home* fifty year later. We will also look at other works including *Home* by Nadia Fall (2016), *Love* by Alexander Zeldin (2017) and *NoMad* by Nell Hardy (2022) that variously explore the lived experience of temporary accommodation and the intersections of homelessness, mental health, gender and sexuality.

Weeks 7-9 (autumn): The Migration Crisis

There has been growing concerns with the 'migration crisis' and human trafficking as demonstrated by the political response to the growing numbers of deaths at sea as thousands flee war-torn countries and persecution or seek a better standard of living. In this section of the module we will look at how a number of plays and performances have addressed the topic including Clare Bayley's *The Container* (2007), *Lampedusa* (2015) by Anders Lustgarten, *Adam* (2017) by Frances Poet; Good Chance Theatre's *The Jungle* and Nicola McCartney and Dritan Kashrati's *How Not to Drown* (2019).

Weeks 10: Introduce Illustrated Portfolio assessment

Weeks 1-3 (spring): Black Lives Matter

This section will address ways that Black British playwrights, theatre-makers and artists have called out the persistence of white privilege and the absence, marginalisation and denigration of black histories and subjectivities. This will include an exploration of Jasmine Lee-Jones's *Seven Methods of Killing Kylie Jenner* (2019), Somalia Seaton's *Fall of the Kingdom, Rise of the Footsoldier* (2016), Jonzi D and Jessica Care Moore's *We Want Our Bodies Back* (2020), Testament's *Black Men Walking* (2019) debbie tucker green's *ear for eye* (2019) and *For Black Boys Who have Considered Suicide When the Hue Gets Too Heavy* (2022) by Ryan Calais Cameron.

Weeks 3-5 (spring): Class, Race, the North and the 'Undeserving Poor'

This section of the module will consider the ways in which theatre and performance has intervened in questions of class, class identity and the recent rhetoric around the figure of the 'chav', a stigmatised figure that has been used to denigrate elements of the working-class as feckless 'disgusting subjects' lacking culture and character. We will consider how these issues intersect with race, space and specific social geographies such as the North of England and council estates. During these sessions we will look at key examples such as Andrea Dunbar's *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1982); *Port* (2002) by Simon Stephens, Bola Agbaje's *Off the Endz* (2010) and Scottee's *Class* (2014).

Weeks 7-9 (spring): Blighting these Green and Pleasant Lands

Over two weeks we will look at various cultural representations of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma from the high-profile Dale Farm evictions, televisual representations such as *Big Fat Gypsy Weddings* (2010-2012) and media campaigns such as the Sun's 'Stamp on the Camp' initiative launched in 2005. In terms of theatre, we will look at John Arden's *Live Like Pigs* (1958) and Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* (2009), which although produced over fifty years apart, raise remarkably similar issues regarding the tense relations between traditionally nomadic and settled communities and anxieties around space, place and identity and the need to exert control over the other.

Week 10 (spring): feedback and essay tutorials

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which playwrights and theatre-makers have used theatre to respond to, intervene in and debate issues around social abjection and display an understanding of why and how the concerns addressed relate to wider historical contexts.
- Show an awareness of how theories, issues and debates relating to social abjection, othering and national identity are explored in and through the subject matter, forms, creative processes and performance contexts utilised in a variety of theatre works.

- Describe and assess some of the textual, theatrical and performative strategies used in the works studied.
- Engage in research-based investigation of appropriate primary and secondary source material.
- Communicate what they have learnt both orally, visually and in writing.

Indicative reading list

Adiseshiah, Siân, “Chavs”, “Gypos” and “Scum”? Class in Twenty-First-Century Drama’, in *Twenty-First Century Drama: What Happens Now*, ed. by Siân Adiseshiah and Louise Lepage, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2016, pp. 149-171

Ahmed, Sara *Strange Encounters: Embodies Others in Post-Coloniality*, London: Routledge, 2000

Beswick, Katie, *Social Housing in Performance: The English Council Estate on and off Stage*, London: Bloomsbury, 2019

Bhopal, Kalwant and Martin Myers, *Insiders, Outsiders and Others: Gypsies and Identity*, University of Hertfordshire Press, 2008.

Clayton, Owen, eds. *Representing Homelessness*, Oxford University Press, 2021.

Cox, Emma and Caroline Wake, ‘Envisioning Asylum/Engendering Crisis’, a special issue of *Research in Drama Education*, Vol. 23, 2018

Eddo-Lodge, Reni *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, revised edition, London: Bloomsbury, 2018 [2017]

Jeffers, Alison, *Refugees, Theatre and Crisis: performing Global Identities*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2012

Jones, Owen (2012) *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*, revised edition, London: Verso

Kirk, John, *Class, Culture and Social Change*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007

Skeggs, Beverley, *Class, Self, Culture*, London: Routledge, 2004

Tyler, Imogen, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* London: Zed Books, 2013

Winlow, Simon, et al, *Riots and Political Protest*, Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2015

Research element

Students will be undertaking weekly research in preparation for sessions and will be required to research selected topics for assessment.

Interdisciplinary

This module will engage with material from political theory, sociology, theatre and performance studies.

International

This module will address themes including colonialism and migration that have an international dimension

Subject specific skills

By the end of this module, students should be able to demonstrate a critical understanding of:

What is meant by the concept of 'social abjection' and how social abjection is generated, maintained and experienced through social discourse by a number of different groups in society.

How theatrical practice contributes to national debate by creating alternatives to dominant narratives and images of social abjection/stigmatization evident in political campaigns, media discourse and popular debate.

How theatre and theatricality has played a part in reframing narratives through its storying and representation of issues.

How a range of different theatrical contexts and forms from large-scale plays for major theatres, to smaller-scale community pieces that encompass various styles including musicals, verbatim and monologues have been employed to address key themes and issues.

Furthermore, they should be able to: constructively critique the theatrical strategies and techniques employed by playwrights, theatre makers and performance artists.

Transferable skills

- Analysis and decision making
- Cognitive flexibility
- Communication skills
- Creativity
- Critical thinking
- Independent research
- Interpersonal and communication skills
- Intrapersonal skills
- Planning and organisational skills
- Problem solving
- Self-management

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	18 sessions of 2 hours (12%)
Tutorials	2 sessions of 1 hour (1%)
Private study	126 hours (42%)
Assessment	136 hours (45%)
Total	300 hours

Private study description

Approx 6-8hrs per week of preparatory reading, viewing, note taking and general research

In addition to this students have to prepare a 4000 word essay and a portfolio presentation. The preparation time for each of these assessments is in the region of 70 hrs (or two weeks full-time work) spread over the course of each term.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time
Essay	50%	68 hours
You will have a choice of up to 10 essay titles to choose from. You will also have the option to create your own title.		
Group Illustrated Portfolio	50%	68 hours
Focusing on one theme you will work in small groups of 2-3 to create an illustrated portfolio that interrogates the ways in which 'social abjection' is evident and/or contested in society, culture and the arts. This illustrated portfolio may take the form of a film, website, narrated powerpoint, mock newspaper/magazine or another form to be approved by the module convenor.		

Feedback on assessment

written feedback and one-to-one tutorial

Availability

Courses

This module is Option list A for:

- UTHA-W421 Undergraduate Theatre and Performance Studies
 - Year 2 of W421 Theatre and Performance Studies
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