**Drama 129W / Spring 2025**

**THEATER AND WAR**

**Instructor:** Minu Park, Ph.D. ([minwoop2@uci.edu](mailto:minwoop2@uci.edu))

**Date/Time/Location:** MW 1:00-2:20 pm, MAB 125

**Office Hour:** After class and by appt. (Wed 3-4 pm, sign-up at <https://calendly.com/d/crwr-k6n-cdt/129w-office-hour>)

**Course Description**

How do we *feel* war? How do we *experience* it—whether directly or indirectly, visibly or invisibly? This course explores war as not only a geopolitical event but a deeply felt, embodied phenomenon that permeates personal, cultural, and historical consciousness. Through theater as a framework, we will examine war as a staged enactment, one that involves actors, designers, spectators, and constructed narratives that shape our perception of conflict. Rather than treating war as distant history or abstract policy, this course foregrounds how we engage with war vicariously—through media, narratives, and cultural memory—alongside its direct entanglements in global and personal histories. Theater, as both an artistic and analytical framework, offers a means to experience and articulate war beyond firsthand encounters, allowing us to examine how conflict is staged, mediated, and emotionally navigated.

While this course engages with war as a global phenomenon, it is also conscious that our vantage point is shaped by our specific location in the U.S., where war is largely experienced through mediation rather than direct exposure. By acknowledging this positionality, we will reflect on how this distance shapes public discourse and emotional responses to conflict. We will engage with various mediums, including plays, films, museums, puppetry, documentary, memorial sites, and critical texts, to trace how war manifests across different sectors of life. Themes of spectacle, gender, guilt and secrecy, truth and reconciliation, and more will guide our exploration of how war lingers in its material aftermath and its spectral echoes in daily lives.

*\*This course engages with materials that depict war, violence, and trauma. Some content may be disturbing. Please take care as you process these works, and reach out if you need support.*

**Learning Objectives**

By taking this course, students will:

* Explore war as an embodied and affective experience, understanding both its humanizing and dehumanizing effects.
* Analyze the role of narratives and spectacle in constructing and resisting war, tracing how these narratives are circulated and reimagined.
* Recognize war as an ongoing process, rather than a singular event, requiring continued negotiation through mechanisms such as truth commissions, reconciliation efforts, and artistic interventions.
* Examine how war is staged, performed, and reenacted in theater, film, memorials, and everyday life to shape individual and collective memory.

**Course Policies**

Resource Requirements

* Students are expected to have fluency in navigating Canvas, accessing library materials (reading and viewing assignments), and referring to the syllabus for guidance. If you have any difficulties navigating in these areas, please feel free to ask; however, unfamiliarity with these resources will not be considered an extenuating circumstance for requesting alternative arrangements.
* Please familiarize yourself with using the **UCI VPN** for accessing library resources off campus ([**https://www.lib.uci.edu/connect**](https://www.lib.uci.edu/connect)). This will give you access to library materials, including many video and film resources.

Communication

* Please use office hours and email for communication. For guidance on professional communication, refer to: <https://library.daytonastate.edu/onlinecom/email> <https://apuedge.com/tips-for-communicating-with-your-onlineinstructors/>
* Please allow the instructor 24 hours for a response, and 48 hours during weekends. I do not respond to emails with questions that can be answered by consulting Canvas or the syllabus.

Academic Integrity

* Understand your responsibilities to credit the source of any citation. Remember that paraphrasing someone’s idea is also considered plagiarism. Please see the website of UCI Office of Academic Integrity & Student Conduct for more details: <https://aisc.uci.edu/students/academicintegrity/index.php>
* Take a quiz to understand academic integrity → <http://bit.ly/uciacademicintegrity>

**Writing Resources**

1. Purdue’s Online Writing Lab (<https://owl.purdue.edu/>)
2. UCI Writing Center (see directions on Canvas)

**Assignments and Assessment**

1. Attendance & Participation (25%)

* This includes attending class, engaging in discussions, and providing thoughtful feedback to peers. Two absences are allowed without requiring an explanation. Please use these absences wisely, as I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences.

1. Weekly Writing Assignments (30%)

* Due: **Sundays at 11:59 PM (200-250 words)**
* Each week, you will submit a brief reflection on the primary material (play, film, artwork, etc.) using the following prompt:

**1. Describe how you think the material intends to make you feel/think about war. What artistic choices/elements shape this effect?**

**2. Describe if this aligns with how you actually felt/thought about the content. Did it succeed in shaping your perspective? Why or why not?**

* The secondary readings (articles, essays, etc.) will serve as guides for thinking about these questions.
* Lowest 2 scores will be automatically dropped. This is to accommodate any unforeseen or extenuating circumstances that may arise during the quarter.
* Purpose: This assignment is designed to be low-stakes and exploratory. You are not expected to be “correct,” but rather to engage critically and personally with the material. These reflections may later serve as material for your final portfolio.

1. Group Presentation (15%)

* Each group will give a 15-minute presentation on one of the week’s primary materials (play, film, artwork, documentary, etc.). The goal is to provide the class with an introduction/overview that deepens engagement with the material and generates discussion.
* Your presentation should include:
  + **Contextual Background**: Who created this work? When and why was it made? How does it relate to its historical or cultural context?
  + **Basic Facts About the War/Conflict Depicted**: If the work references a historical war/conflict, provide a brief overview of essential details (e.g., key dates, locations, major events, political or ideological stakes). You do not need to give a full history lesson—just enough so the class has the necessary context to engage with the artwork (e.g. names mentioned in the work).
  + **Artistic and Thematic Analysis**: What choices does this work make in depicting war? How does it use form (e.g., narrative structure, visual elements, performance techniques) to shape meaning?
  + **Key Discussion Questions**: What aspects of the work do you find most striking or thought-provoking? What should the class consider while engaging with it? (Discussion will take place after the 15 minute presentation)
  + Feel free to include media clips, images, or short excerpts to illustrate key points.

1. Final Project: Writing Portfolio (30%)

* **Requirement: min. 4,000 words / due Thursday, June 12**
* Your final portfolio will be a curated collection of writing that explores a central theme related to war and artistic mediation. Instead of requiring a single, long-form research paper, this format allows you to put together various pieces of writing (e.g., personal anecdotes, film reviews, historical research, critical arguments, statistical analyses, etc.).
* You should include a **one-page cover letter** at the beginning of the packet that explains how the portfolio is structured and why.
* Your portfolio should respond to one or more of the following guiding questions:
  + How does artistic mediation shape our understanding of war?
  + What does it mean to “experience” war through performance, reenactment, or memory?
  + How do theater and visual storytelling construct war narratives, and to what effect?
  + How does war live beyond its immediate moment, through history, trauma, and endurance?
* Tips
  + You are encouraged to expand on weekly write-ups and refine them into a larger, coherent project.
  + Each individual piece can vary in length. There are no strict limits as long as your total submission reaches 4,000 words.
  + If you prefer a traditional research paper format, you can still approach the portfolio as a structured, multi-section research paper, using the piecing format as subheadings for different angles of analysis.
* Scaffolded Check-ins (one-page)
  + Week 5 (Proposal): Due May 4
  + Week 7 (Annotated Bibliography): Due May 18
  + Week 9 (Peer Review Draft): Due June 1
* Assessment Criteria
  + **Depth & Insight**: Engages meaningfully with war, performance, and mediation.
  + **Coherence & Structure**: Pieces connect under a unifying theme, introduced in a short 1-2 page introduction.
  + **Engagement with Course Materials**: Draws on course materials and class discussions.
  + Please also refer to the **Upper-Division Writing Course Rubric** on Canvas.

**Weekly Schedule (subject to change)**

W1: Staging War (literally)

Mar 31 Introduction to the class

Apr 2 *Wag the Dog* (1997, dir. Barry Levinson)

[Optional: *Theaters of War* (2022)]

W2: Truth and Reconciliation, Theater of the Court / Puppetry, Multimedia Theater

Apr 7 Jane Taylor, *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1998)

Apr 9 Tamar Meskin and Tanya van der Walt, “‘Public Hearing of Private Griefs’: Investigating the Performance of History in Jane Taylor’s *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1998) and John Kani’s *Nothing but the Truth* (2002)” (2013)

W3: Theater of Loyalty / Musical

Apr 14 Jay Kuo, Lorenzo Thione, and Marc Acito, *Allegiance* (2012) \*

Apr 16 [#Recorded Lecture]

Lindsey N. Kingston, “George Takei’s *Allegiance*: WWII Japanese American Incarceration as a Cautionary Tale” (2024)

W4: Theater of Terrorism / Visual Art

Apr 21 [#Recorded Lecture]

* + - Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars 1991–2011 (Nov 3, 2019–Mar 1, 2020, MoMA PS1), <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/5084>?

Apr 23 Kenan Van de Mieroop, “Naming Atrocity: *Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars 1991-2011*, Curated by Peter Eleey and Ruba Katrib.” (2020)

Eleni Zaras, “New York City's MoMA PS1 "Gulf Wars Exhibition Caught in Crossfire.” (2020)

W5: Theater of Gender, Sex, and Shame / Documentary Film

Apr 28 *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women* (2000, dir. Dai Sil Kim-Gibson) \*

Apr 30 Megan Ratner, “Dreamland and Disillusion: Interview with Dai Sil Kim-Gibson” (2011)

[Optional: *Theater of War* (2010)]

**Due Sunday (May 4): Proposal**

W6: Theater of Cold War / War Reenactment

May 5 [Guest Speaker (An-Ru Chu) on Kinmen Island War Reenactment]

May 7 *The Act of Killing* (2012, dir. Joshua Oppenheimer)\*

[Optional: *The Look of Silence* (2014, dir. Joshua Oppenheimer)]

W7: Theater of the State / Museums and Memorials

May 12 War Tourism: Monuments & Memorials in Washington D.C. (<https://washington.org/visit-dc/monuments-memorials?page=0>)

May 14 Richard Crownshaw, “Performing Memory in Holocaust Museums” (2000)

**Due Sunday (May 18): Annotated Bibliography**

W8: Vicarious Memory / Oral and Cinematic Histories

May 19 [Guest Speaker (Dr. Ann Tran) on Vietnamese ghost stories, family altars, and

private memories]

May 21 *Hotel Rwanda* (2004, dir. Terry George) \*

*The Safe House: Hotel Rwanda* (2014, Africa24 Media)

[Optional: Shohini Chaudhuri, “History Lessons: What Audiences (Could) Learn about Genocide from Historical Dramas” in *Cinema of the Dark Side: Atrocity and the Ethics of Film Spectatorship* (2014), pp. 50-57, 67-78.]

W9: Going Through War

May 26 NO CLASS – MEMORIAL DAY

May 28 [Guest Speaker (Hanna Dosenko) on war in Ukraine and making theater]

**Due Sunday (June 1): Peer Review Draft**

W10: Campus Anti-War Protests / Posters

June 2 Carol A. Wells, “Can Art Stop a War and Save the Planet?” TEDx

[Final Paper Workshop: Peer Consultation]

June 4 Courtney Erin Colligan et al., “Decarcerating the University: A Roundtable Discussion” (2024)

[Optional: *1948: Creation & Catastrophe* (2017, dir. Andy Trimlett and Ahlam Muhtaseb)]

Finals Week

June 12 Final paper due