Group Projects 2008

Feb 14  **Group 1** Experiment with an Air Pump viewed as class oppression

Much of the power of Air Pump derives from the fact that it centres its action on the turn of two different centuries – times often associated with radical apocalyptic change and transformation and a sharp break with the past. In both eras, separated by 200 years, science is seen by many as the great force of pure, objective knowledge that, wielded by rational, enlightened scientists will eradicate a host of old physical, social and physical ills in the world. Examining the thought of Althusser, Brecht and Lyotard, discuss the extent to which the optimistic Enlightenment view of science and scientist alike fails to take into account the way that the seemingly enlightened social, economic and power systems that support science and scientist alike actually work. To what extent is the desire for radical change unlimited by the forces of the past potentially the source of much good? Do what extent does a failure to understand the past properly and where one stands in relationship to it, jeopardize the possibility of real social, economic, and political progress?

Feb 28  **Group 2** Experiment with an Air Pump as feminist gender critique

The 18th century saw the birth, at least in the Western tradition, of liberal feminism as well as liberal humanism – the belief that men and women were equal as human beings and education would be the great liberating force that would level the differences between the sexes and allow women, like men, to succeed in the public realm on merit alone. Discussing the thought of Irigaray, Cixous and Grosz discuss the extent to which liberal feminism succeeds in liberating women in the 18th and 20th centuries – and the extent to which it fails because of what it does not understand about the situation of women (and perhaps men) working within power systems and views of equality and humanity dominated by men.

March 6  **Group 3** The Laramie Project as gay gender critique

While Ibsen stated that A Doll’s House was a reflection of his commitment as a poet to a deeply felt humanism rather than feminist ideology, he also admitted that the seed of the play came from a disturbing real-life incident that made it clear to him that women adhered to one law, and men to another, and their inability to understand each other led to “modern tragedy”. Referring to the thought of Diamond, Butler and other writers of “queer” and gender theory, discuss the Laramie Project as a close historical/documentary examination of a disturbing real-life incident in a small town that attempts to delve into larger issues of gender as constructed and shaped by the surrounding social, economic, legal and religious order that shape and drive people in a way they may not have understood themselves before the tragedy.
**Mar 18**

**Group 4** The performed body as sign in productions of *She Stoops to Conquer*

While *She Stoops to Conquer* celebrates a world and society long passed away, the play itself has continued to fascinate readers, spectators, actors, directors, and designers as a curiously modern piece. Referring to the performance/spectator theories of Mulvey, Foucault, Wilson and other theorists, discuss the varying “constructions” of Goldsmith’s characters and their world in performance and production from the 18th through to the 21st century. Reviewing the performance/production history of the play from its beginnings to the present day, explain why the play has remained popular over the centuries and the ways in which directors, actors and scene designers have tried anew to keep Goldsmith fresh and “contemporary” for new audiences beyond the 18th century.

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**Mar 27**

**Group 5** *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* as post-colonial critique

Wole Soyinka, one of the most important and profound writers to emerge from post-colonial Africa, decried the tendency of critics outside the culture to reduce his work to plays about individuals caught in cruel moral dilemmas, or the “clash between old values and new ways, between western methods and African traditions.” Aboriginal playwright, Thomson Highway, would agree that the relationship between colonizer and colonialized in a Canadian context is also all the more difficult, complex and ironic because both sides and their art work out of substantially different metaphysical, mythic, and ideological world views. The critical reception to *Dry Lips* raised the question of whether an aboriginal playwright is justified in showing certain kinds of violence on stage to demonstrate the unconscious as well as conscious damage being done to aboriginals by white culture. Is such violence necessary to expose the depth of the evil before it can be adequately addressed and fixed by both sides? Or do such practices in the theatre just reinforce negative images and stereotypes of aboriginals in the minds of white audiences, misrepresent and demonize whites and drives both groups even farther apart? Referring to the theories of Mohammed, Lott, hooks and Gilbert, and post-colonial theorists including Thomson Highway himself, discuss the extent to which *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* functions successfully or unsuccessfully as a post-colonial document that addresses in text, performance and production the complex relationship between colonizer and colonized in the contemporary world.