

Emmet's Latest Production: The Clean House

EMMET – THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT THEATRE GROUP

Last semester, Emmet worked on Sarah Ruhl's award winning play, *The Clean House* (2006). The workshop culminated in three productions in the third week of December. The duration of the workshop was extended to accommodate the extensive workload that was required to realize the production. As a prelude to the final production, Emmet took part in "Version Originale II," in La Fête du Théâtre 2015, on the 30th of October, where an excerpt from *The Clean House* was performed to a full crowd.



This hilarious dark comedy takes place in a "metaphysical Connecticut," in the home of a married couple, Charles and Lane, who are both doctors. Matilde, a young Brazilian woman, comes to work for them as a house-maid. Yet, according to Lane, Matilde is depressed. She doesn't like cleaning because "it makes her sad" (Ruhl, 34). Instead she aspires to be a comedian. She was born to the funniest people in Brazil. In her opening monologue, we learn the real reason for her depression: the death of her mother from a joke told by Matilde's father. After her father's subsequent suicide, she moves to the States to pursue her dream of being a comedian.

Trouble comes when Lane's husband, Charles, falls in love with his cancer patient, Ana, on whom he performs surgery. He believes Ana to be his soul mate, or his *bashert*, the Yiddish term for a "destiny." Understandably, when Charles and Ana visit Lane to ex-

plain the "objective" nature of their relationship, there ensues one of the most awkwardly hilarious scenes of the play.



This deceptively light comedy can be profoundly moving, even transformative at times. Beneath the whimsy and silliness, an underlying tragic tone is embedded in the play. The actors were challenged to find a balance in the tragicomedy spectrum. It was striking to see how the tone of the play changed drastically according to the way the audience responded. Overall, it was an exhilarating experience for the actors and the audience alike.



n.b. Photos courtesy of Marlon Ariyasinghe

Work Cited:

Ruhl, Sarah. *The Clean House and Other Plays*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2006.

Dream Duplex: *Emmet's 2016 Spring Semester Creative Project*

NICHOLAS WEEKS

Why dreams?

The focus on dreams this semester stems from a personal interest in more experimental forms of theatre work. Over the years I have found that students participating in the English department theatre workshops have always had more to offer than it was ever possible for me to anticipate. I came to the conclusion that working with a completed script from the beginning of the rehearsals tends to limit the creative potential of the individual actors joining in the company, whether it be the passing Erasmus student mixing in with the group for a semester, or the more seasoned participant developing their skills and partaking in the enjoyment of play-acting over the whole course of their studies. To enhance that sense of pleasure in the creative process, in the coming-into-being of a collective work, the workshops have thus been conceived as an exploratory space. Within this (relatively) secure environment, actors should feel free to experiment with new modes of behaviours, postures, or forms of address without risking any of the potentially nefarious consequences to their public “face” or “front” as might occur outside the theatrical environment.

Though dreaming and acting are obviously different activities, to me, there is an intimate connection between our immersion in a dream world and the art of acting. Acting holds an ambivalent relation to our sense of interiority. Part of the art is technical and involves, for instance, committing words and sentences to memory or developing one’s diction. Acting, however, is also an exploratory activity, where actors may be asked to experiment with alternative vocal inflections to their natural phrasing of a text or to modulate slightly the pace of a given utterance. It is on this second, more intimate, dimension that Emmet’s new production of *Dream Duplex* will hinge.

Based on a series of excerpts derived from the literary tradition and evocative of dreams across the ages (Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Keats, Emily Dickinson, Philip Larkin, Doris Lessing, or J. M. Coetzee), the actors will be paired with

a “double” during the workshops and asked to rehearse passages simultaneously, at the level of both gesture and speech. This extended actor’s experiment will not seek to turn the participants into robots by adopting the easy stability of a regular monotone utterance. Rather, by attuning the various participants’ sense of timing to their “double,” the workshops will attempt to allow for a sense of uncanny identification while leaving space for micro-fractures in the mirror performance. If it succeeds, the perceptual dissonances that the play will seek to elicit in the audience should thus create a sense of acoustic bewilderment, troubling assumed notions of a unitary self, while inviting the spectator’s imagination to engage fully in the space and temporality of these narratives drawn from fragmented dream worlds.

Ever performed on stage to a live audience?

If you wish to join the company and be part of our new project, or simply join us for one rehearsal and see how things go, a trial session is set for Friday, 26 February, between 2:00-4:00 p.m. in Uni Mail S180. Formal registrations will be taken on the Activités Culturelles webpage in order of arrival (<https://www.unige.ch/dife/culture/cours/theatre/theatreanglais>).

Dream Duplex will be performed on three consecutive evenings, 4-6 May 2016, in Uni Mail. The project has also been submitted to the second edition of the Geneva University theatre festival *Commedia*, 9-15 May 2016, hosted by the theatre *La Comédie*.

Interested in becoming a production assistant?

This semester, the company will open up a “production assistant” position. Though most of Emmet’s past productions have been collaborative projects involving all of the participants, we’d like to record in print the progression of a creative project as it unfolds. It will be the task of the production assistant to attend the rehearsals and contribute to the exchange of ideas while keeping a diary of the various trials and breakthroughs of the cast as they work their way towards the production.

Reviews and critics

Finally, the company also seeks reviews and critics. We can only learn and improve ourselves by getting critical feedback from our target audience. Students of the department who might be tempted by this different form of engagement with the stage and

who might wish to attend some of the final rehearsals are encouraged to get in touch with either the company or the editor of *Noted*. We would be delighted to provide these potential reviewers and critics with insights into the inner-workings of our production.

Students, alumni, and outside participants who would like to join Emmet can register for the workshop at <http://www.a-c.ch/>.

For more details, please go to <http://emmet.ch/> or contact Nicholas.Weeks@unige.ch

CREATIVE WRITING