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Yes, we’re producing our 8th Annual One Act New Play Festival. Don’t miss it! Great student plays, with oodles of young talent.

It opens on Wednesday, May 3. See you there!

en:Toddella Nuova

xoxo
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NOEL SALZMAN (Director) works in theater, video and audio. Since 1990 he has been co-artistic director of The Butane Group, a collective of theater and media artists that create new work, often based on politically-charged non-fiction material. He teaches directing to NYU undergraduates at Playwrights Horizons Theatre School. His most recent project, The Loneliness of Noam Chomsky (a performance), was the culmination of his work at NYU’s Gallatin School for Individualized Study, where he studied digital media and social activism. His written MA thesis will focus on a selected history of multimedia political theatre, including the work of Erwin Piscator, the Federal Theatre’s Living Newspapers, and Peter Sellars. His video adaptation of The Merchant of Venice, utilizing Kathy Acker’s radical version of the play, was screened all over the world, and won an award at the Rochester International Film Festival. The next Butane Group show, Operation Ajax, will focus on the CIA’s covert coup against Iran’s first democratically-elected government in 1953. A radio adaptation of Gertrude Stein’s Listen To Me will be completed in 2005. A work-in-progress of a new theatre piece with video, will be presented in August. The Group also continues to present Neglected Experimental Masterpieces of the 1980s, a reading series.

ANKA LUPEES (Set & Costume Designer) Recent design credits include Three Sisters (dir. Pavel Liska) at Classic Stage Co., and Henry IV and A Midsummer Night’s Dream for the Virginia Shakespeare Festival. Past productions include Madame de Sade and Ruth Margraff’s folk opera, Café de Avignon, both directed by Ian Belton; Goldoni’s La Casa Nova (dir. Liviu Ciulei); Playboy of the West Indies (dir. Tazewell Thompson); Humperdinck’s Hansel and Gretel (dir. William Wesbrooks); The US premiere of Rossini’s L’Equivoque Stravagante (dir. Benjamin Spierman); Showboat (dir. Randy White); a new musical version of The Nutcracker (dir. Bruce Merrill), a children’s opera (dir. Gordon Ostrowski) at MSM; The Battle of the Blacks and the Dogs (dir. Doris Mincus); and Name Day (dir. by Marcy Arlin). She has designed projects at the Theater Row and Ohio theatres, Kaye Playhouse, Lovinger and Frederick Lowe theatres, Theatre at St. Clements, The Barrow Group Theatre, PS122, HERE, and The Culture Project. Film and television credits include production design and art direction for short films and shows aired on Showtime, TLC, Nick@Nite, NBC, FuseTV. Ms. Lupees is trained as an architect and holds an MFA in stage design from NYU/Tisch.


KATIE DOWN (Sound Designer & Composer) composer, sound artist, multi-instrumentalist, and occasional troublemaker has created and performed numerous sound scores for theatre and dance companies both in NYC and abroad. She is a classically trained flutist and plays numerous instruments including guitar, ukulele, dumbek, frame drum, glass and homemade instruments, and found objects. She has conducted voice and improvisation workshops at international festivals and with theatre companies and schools throughout the Balkans, US, and Europe. She was recently an artist-in-residence at the center for Jewish culture, Makor, and leads the Sephardic ensemble, Adelante. She is occasionally seen performing, singing, and creating general mayhem with the ukulele group, The Ukuladies.
Gertrude Stein was an avant-garde American writer, who lived most of her life and produced the bulk of her work in her famous Paris home at 27 Rue de Fleurus. Her salon became a gallery and a point of gathering for the thriving Parisian art scene between the World Wars. Stein was gay. She was also a notorious egomaniac, who famously wrote her autobiography from the perspective of her lifelong partner Alice B. Toklas largely to escape the requisite humility associated with autobiographical writing.

She was born on February 3, 1874 in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, now part of Pittsburgh, into a wealthy German-Jewish family. When she was only three years old, her family moved to Vienna, and then to Paris. She returned to America two years later and was educated in California. She graduated from Radcliffe College in 1897. She went on to Johns Hopkins Medical School, but dropped out and moved to Paris to live with her brother Leo, supported largely by a stipend from her family's business in the US. Leo and Gertrude became prominent art critics and were great patrons of cubism. She owned some of Pablo Picasso's early paintings, along with works by Henri Matisse, Georges Braque and Andre Derain. Picasso became a close friend and painted the most famous portrait of Stein. It was also her personal favorite.

As well as befriending and encouraging the founders of cubism, Braque and Picasso, Stein tried to reflect the ideas of cubism in her own literary work. Her texts focus intensely on the present moment and use simplification, fragmentation and slightly varied repetition to achieve the immediacy and completeness associated with cubist art. Other frequent visitors to her home were a group of expatriate American writers, including Ernest Hemingway and Sherwood Anderson. She coined the phrase “The Lost Generation” for the American literary scene in Paris which, as well as the aforementioned and Stein herself, included F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ezra Pound, Waldo Peirce and Sylvia Beach. The phrase has also now been used to refer to the generation of people coming of age in the US during World War I.

It was during this time in Paris that she met Alice B. Toklas. They remained together for the rest of Stein’s life, and The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas is Stein’s autobiography, written from Toklas’s perspective. Around the time that Alice moved into 27 Rue de Fleurus, Leo and Gertrude had a falling out (often blamed on Alice). Leo moved out and he and Gertrude rarely spoke to each other for the rest of their lives.

Stein’s first published work was Three Lives, in 1909. It is the story of three working class women, and is regarded as a masterpiece. Most of her work was too abstract and convoluted for the general public (to whom she was known principally as the author behind “A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose” and little else). The only time she achieved popular acclaim was the only time she tried to achieve it (with The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas; 1933). Her immediate financial and popular success reflected the ideas of cubism in her own literary work. She went on a very successful lecture tour of the US, and then returned to France, just in time for World War II.

Stein and Toklas stayed in France under the Nazi puppet Vichy Regime. They had friends in high places and were protected despite the fact that they were both Jewish and gay. Stein died at the age of 72 of stomach cancer on July 27, 1946 in France. She is buried in the famous Pere Lachaise cemetery.

and suffering strikes and labor conflicts. Both Britain and France were still empires and had huge expenses associated with maintaining them. These factors partially explain the policy of appeasement carried out by the Europeans.

The US population was deeply divided about entering the war. After the horrors of WWI, many Americans desired a sense of isolationism (the US never officially joined the League of Nations, for example).

There was no unified concept within France of how to deal with Germany and Italy – some wanted the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles carried out at all costs (they demanded huge reparations from Germany), others felt no concern at the military build-ups and aggressions of the axis powers. They felt that they would simply spend themselves into defeat and that simply building up an adequate national defense would be deterrent enough. With the French government were anti-Fascist, pro-Fascist, anti-Communist camps and pro-Communist camps. The government was so divided that it could not function at all and eventually, in effect, surrendered foreign policy decisions to Britain.

Stein herself took politically complicated stances. An initial supporter of the Vichy regime (the puppet government that was installed in June 1940, once France had surrendered to the Germans) she was, at the same time a supporter of the peasant and working classes. At times, in her writings, she exhibits an almost willful refusal to acknowledge the war and its interference in her daily life.
The electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message. The “content” of any medium is always another medium. The context of writing is speech etc.

Gertrude Stein, Portraits and Repetitions

The principle of mechanization excludes the very possibility of growth or the understanding of change. For mechanization is achieved by fragmentation of any process and by putting the fragmented parts in a series. Yet as Hume showed in the 18th century, there is no principle of causality in a mere sequence. Nothing follows from following, except change. So the greatest of all reversals occurred with electricity, that ended sequences by making things instant.

Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man

In the electric age we wear all mankind as our skin.

But what if God himself can it be simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.

Jean Baudrillard, Simulations

Is there repetition or is there insistence. I am inclined to believe there is no such thing as repetition. And really how can there be. Think about all the detective stories everybody reads. The kind of crime is the same, and the idea of the story is very often the same...always having the same theme, that is, if you like, repetition, that is if you like the repeating that is the same thing, but once started expressing this thing, expressing anything there can be no repetition because the essence of that expression is insistence, and if you insist you must each time use emphasis and if you use emphasis it is not possible while anybody is alive that they should use exactly the same emphasis. And so let us think seriously of the differences between repetition and insistence.

Gertrude Stein, Lectures in America

On the telephone, or on the air, man is in every sense discarnate, existing as an abstract image, a figure without a body. The Cheshire cat in Alice in Wonderland is a kind of parallel to our state. When discarnate, man has no identity, and is not subject to natural law. In fact he has no basis for morals of any sort. As electric information moved at the speed of light, man is a nobody. When deprived of his identity, man becomes violent in diverse ways. Violence is the quest for identity.

Marshall McLuhan, letter to Clare Boothe Luce

Stein specifies how she learned to write paragraphs, meaning how she developed prose paragraphs corresponding to her philosophy. Given her other principles, how does she know how to group her thoughts together, when to begin and end any sequences. Having decided that the structure of sentences does not apply to paragraphs, she learned to write paragraphs by listening to a dog drink water. She does not mean this facetiously or condescendingly, she was always respectful of animals. She is talking about breathing; about taking in as much as possible before necessity. This is a function of rhythm.
Cubism is a school of painting, largely invented by Pablo Picasso and George Braques between 1906 and 1913. Working in Paris, these painters developed a form of painting that draws some influence from the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists who immediately preceded them, but with important changes.

Impressionists, like Monet and Manet, began with the idea that the world meets the eye as bits and splashes of color, which we then interpret, based on past experience, as tables, chairs, flowers, fields, etc. Impressionists wanted to capture the immediate visual “impression” of the world, not the fully interpreted mental image we create after having viewed something. In this way, Impressionists made the process of seeing apparent by highlighting exactly what we see rather than our mentally-processed interpretation. While Cubist paintings look markedly different from Impressionist paintings, they retain the emphasis on making sight itself the object of the painting. Cubism highlights sensory experience and the process of seeing.

Both Impressionism and Cubism defamiliarize the commonplace to make the process of seeing more active, more apparent. As the critic, Pepe Karmel writes, “Rather than a description, it offered an ‘equivalent’ for experience.” Cubism took this approach a step further, removing the last vestiges of resemblance and offering a composition that was explicitly a combination of abstract signs and isolated recognizable details. The painted image now needed to be read or decoded.” Cubist paintings are often difficult to interpret, even though they may be representing everyday things like a still life or a person. The paintings are abstract, meaning that they do not resemble something from the real world.

Cubism further attempts to de-familiarize reality by offering an equivalent to reality instead of reality itself. Rather than relying strictly on visual sensation, as the Impressionists had done, they turned to representing the emotional or intellectual equivalent to reality. The paintings become tethered to the artist’s reaction to subjects.

A third influence on Cubism comes from the rise of the decorative arts around the same time that the Cubists were experimenting. These decorative arts, like carpets, tapestries, and tile floors relied on simplified forms and geometric shapes rather than creating pictures. Patterns took precedence over pictures in creating designs. The objects in the picture were deliberately made to look flat and two-dimensional. Rather than playing with a range of colors, these forms of art limited the color palette to a few central colors or shades of the same color. Cubism, likewise, relies on geometric patterns, a limited color palette, and simple shapes.

One of the most radical things that Cubism did was to dismantle the traditional notion of perspective. The Cubists dismissed this notion of perspective completely. They built their paintings on a series of planes that are juxtaposed and overlaid. Braque said, “traditional perspective, with its diagonals converging toward a vanishing point, made the things in the picture appear to recede from the viewer. It was therefore necessary to abandon perspective. Instead of beginning with the foreground, I placed myself in the middle of the painting.” Rather than relying on a single perspective in the painting, Braques and Picasso in fact tried to represent multiple perspectives at the same time. Each plane and each perspective in the painting carried equal weight, so that the emphasis is on multiplicity rather than unity.

Just as Cubism tried to de-familiarize everyday objects by making the viewer decipher them in the painting, so Stein’s writing tries to de-familiarize the text by playing with different sentence structures and word choices. While Cubist painting consists of a field of shapes and surfaces, Stein’s writing consists of strange sentence “shapes,” that is,
starting with Ben Franklin

Many people think Benjamin Franklin discovered electricity with his famous kite-flying experiments in 1752. But, electricity was not discovered all at once. At first, electricity was associated with light. People wanted a cheap and safe way to light their homes, and scientists thought electricity might be a way to do it.

The Battery

Learning how to produce and use electricity was not easy. For a long time there was no dependable source of electricity for experiments. Finally, in 1800, Alessandro Volta, an Italian scientist, made a great discovery. He soaked some paper in salt water, placed zinc and copper on opposite sides of the paper, and watched the chemical reaction produce an electric current. Volta had created the first electric cell.

By connecting many of these cells together, Volta was able to "string a current" and create a battery. It is in honor of Volta that we measure battery power in volts. Finally, a safe and dependable source of electricity was available, making it easy for scientists to study electricity.

A Current Began

An English scientist, Michael Faraday, was the first one to realize that an electric current could be produced by passing a magnet through a copper wire. It was an amazing discovery. Almost all the electricity we use today is made with magnets and coils of copper wire in giant power plants. Both the electric generator and electric motor are based on this principle. A generator converts mechanical energy into electricity. A motor converts electrical energy into mechanical energy.

Mr. Edison and his Light

In 1879, Thomas Edison focused on inventing a practical light bulb, one that would last a long time before burning out. The problem was finding a strong material for the filament, the small wire inside the bulb that conducts the electricity. Finally, Edison used ordinary cotton thread that had been soaked in carbon. The filament didn't burn at all—it became incandescent; that is, it glowed. These light bulbs worked, but they were battery-powered and expensive.

The next challenge was developing an electrical system that could provide people with a practical source of energy to power these new lights. Edison wanted a way to make electricity both practical and inexpensive. He designed and built the first electric power plant that was able to produce electricity and carry it to people's homes.

Edison's Pearl Street Power Station started up its generator on September 4, 1882, in New York City. About 85 customers in lower Manhattan received enough power to light 5,000 lamps. His customers paid a lot for their electricity, though. In today's dollars, the electricity cost $5 per kilowatt-hour! Today, electricity costs a little over eight cents per kilowatt-hour.
The earliest incarnation of what is now “The Faust Legend” is the story of Saint Theophilus the Penitent or Theophilus of Adana, who after being denied his original position in the clergy signed a pact with Satan, in which he renounced Jesus and the Virgin Mary. He became fearful for his soul and prayed to the Virgin and fasted for forty days. The Virgin appeared to him and promised to intercede with God (this is also one of the first instances of Mary having such power, and it played a role in increasing her theological importance). After thirty more days of fasting and prayer, Mary appears again and grants Theophilus abolition. Satan is enraged and three days later, Theophilus wakes up to find the contract resting on his chest. He goes to a legitimate bishop and confesses to all of his sins. The bishop burns the contract and Theophilus dies immediately out of joy.

The origins of the names Faust and Faustus are less clear than the origins of the legend itself. There is an historical record of a German magician and alchemist by the name of Dr. Johann Georg Faust, who is rumored to have publicly denounced Jesus’s miracles and boasted that he could perform similar ones. He is thought to have studied in Kraków, Poland. Interestingly, there is a similar Polish folk tale about one Pan Twardowski, who emigrated to Kraków from Germany. Whatever the historical origins, the name is also likely derived from Latin faustus meaning auspicious and lucky. Another possible etymology is from fustum, Latin for a doctor’s staff.

The most famous literary versions of the myth are Christopher Marlowe’s The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s Faust. Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus was first published in 1604, eleven years after Marlowe died and twelve or more since the play was first performed. It is the oldest theatrical version of the Faust legend. Marlowe was somewhat of a dark legend himself. He was a spy and was killed in a drunken brawl. Before Shakespeare, Marlowe was considered the greatest English tragedian, and it is a popular theory that Marlowe wrote under Shakespeare’s name. Goethe’s Faust, first published in 1808, is probably the best-known version of the story. It was a drama intended to be read, not performed, and considered by many to be the greatest work of German literature ever.

The faust myth

a note on

One has always known Faustus. There is something homely, even childlike about this transgressor magician. We usually see him first in a room filled with books. He has mastered and rejected all forms of knowledge. He wants something different from what they offer, or else wants their essence, what he calls magic. It would be a solvent for his doubt and his desire; an answer his exhaustion. Is it that he wants new toys or that he wants to get rid of all his toys?

So, it is one myth of our modern life. If Faustus wants power he also wants something to cure his solitude. In Christopher Marlowe’s version (first staged around 1590) he speaks to himself in the third person—“Settle thy studies, Faustus”; “Faustus, thou art damned”—as if that could help him in the lack of others to talk with. Both company and power come in the form of a devil named Mephistopheles. In Marlowe he arrives disguised as a monk. In the first part of Goethe’s Faust (begun in 1800) he appears first as a black poodle who follows the scholar home after a walk.

The legend becomes in fact a story about companionship, as well as complicity—the desperate contract in which he sells his soul. Mephistopheles’s magic is to draw him out and on, he opens up his desires, thwarts them even as he fulfills them, tempts him but also confronts him with what he doesn’t know about himself. He supplies him with dreams. The devil also gives him a girl. In Marlowe, Faustus’s great love is an illusion or demonic double of the ancient beauty Helen. In Goethe it is an ordinary girl, Margaret or Gretchen, whom he seduces into love and murder. Gertrude Stein makes one of her great leaps in combining the two into one creature, who calls herself “Marguerite Ida and Helena An-nabel.” Here someone asks, “Would a viper have stung her if she had only one name would he would he?”

We are not allowed to know clearly the cost of these things. The legend was hugely successful on stage from its beginnings, partly because of the chance it gave for stage tricks, the swooping in or flight of devils, visions, visitations, magical spectacles, things appearing and disappearing. Goethe saw it first in a popular version done with puppets, probably one with a clown who imitates Faust’s magic tricks. And Faustus himself, in Marlowe, has a penchant for brilliant, coarse practical jokes and spectacles. He likes to remain at once the center of attention and a creature behind the scenes. The story also works on stage, I think, because Faustus is a figure at once strong and weak, masked and exposed, manipulator and manipulated. Puppet-master and puppet at once.

You would think the Faust story is about the fear of Hell. But one of the discoveries Marlowe makes is that it is a story about wanting to die an ordinary death in the world. His Faust starts out asking for magic, it ends with his solitary cry to be a mere animal, matter, drops of water, breath exhaled in the air. And he gets his wish, you could say, for the play makes pretty absurd, merely theatrical, any manifestation of supernatural magic or demonic punishment. The play does not believe in hell, even if it believes in devils. It becomes a story about our human-ness, our confinement to time, our soul always bound to our body, and to others so bound. One of the most moving and chilling lines in Stein’s play is “I could not go to hell.” Yet her Faustus says at a desperate moment, “I can go to hell all alone.” And then at another: “I could know without any soul to sell, without there being anything in hell.”

Stein knows she is putting on an old show. In some cases, she reminds us of just how emptied out the old mythologies have become. “The devil what the devil what do I care if the devil is there.” Faustus has gone through his story many times, indeed only at the end of Stein’s play do we get round to something like its traditional beginnings. “Mr. Viper” is both a real thing and a mechanical companion, a stuffed animal, something desired and something thrown away. Stein was thinking, I think, of the puppet show, but this made the game all the more serious. “What do I care if the devil is there?” is a serious question.

One great things she does, in probing Faustus’s power and complicity, is to leave us in doubt about who is tempt-ing whom. There is an actor who plays “Faustus,” but in fact every character on stage can become the tempter and every one is tempted. Each is a possible victim or devil, parent or child, seducer or seduced. So they are all the more bound together, even if they seem to find it hard to recognize one other.

But what are the lights?