

TH3171 – Theatre History

Final Research Project

Overview

For the last third of the class, you will investigate one area of theatre history and prepare a 20-minute presentation for the rest of the class. Whereas in the first two-thirds of the class, we have worked together to explore two case studies—“Ancient Theatre” and “Comedy”—you will now devise and undertake your own research agenda to learn more about one of fourteen periods in theatre history. Included in this packet are individual prompts for each step of the process. To complete each step of the assignment, you must access the library’s online resources, visit the stacks and read books on your topic, unearth the socio-political events giving rise to a particular theatre experience in a specific time and space, and synthesize a large body of information for the benefit of your peers.

Always keep two things in mind:

1. The process is just as important as the product; in fact, process is worth slightly more points.
2. Since your project will culminate in a final presentation lasting twenty minutes, you will not be able to tell us everything about your topic. Your job is to intrigue us, to excite us about your topic, to reveal a fascinating event or series of events unfolding in a specific time and place, and to show us how you performed your research.

Goals of the Research Project

1. To practice theatre historiography: the assembling of textual and visual artifacts and scholarly arguments into a guided investigation and exploration of a specific aspect of theatre history
2. To develop research questions capable of driving historiographical inquiry
3. To think of research as a collective undertaking as well as an individual activity
4. To devise effective methods of presenting research to the class
5. To compile an annotated bibliography of sources for future investigation and exploration

Elements of the Presentation

General:

1. Address and expound upon the historical context from which the play or movement emerges
2. Gain access to the embodied or material dimension of the topic under consideration (What’s happening on stage, in the theatre, on the ground, etc.)
3. Outline at least one major debate or contradiction that has sprung up in the secondary literature about the topic (this will help you develop your argument)

Argument

1. The presentation cannot be a summarization of facts about the topic you have studied. You must present an argument
2. The argument must express the significance of your topic in the field of theatre history (why this topic is important to think about)
3. The argument must reveal your group’s unique understanding of the subject matter (for example, what does your group find interesting about this topic and why?). Ask yourselves: what does your individual and collective research help you to see that you

don't see right away? What do you do with this additional information once it comes to light?

Let your research show!

1. Walk the class through your research. Share *how* you came to understand your subject matter in addition to *what* you think about it
2. Share the problems and dead-ends you encountered (and what you did to engage with or overcome those problems)

Group Blogs¹

To track your labor throughout the project we will be using the University's UThink blogging platform. **You must set up your blog as soon as possible (like today).** To set up your group's blog, go to: <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/uthink/>. Once there, follow these steps:

1. Click "Start Blogging" (on the right side of the screen)
2. Mouse over the "Create" tab and select "Blog" from the drop down menu
3. On the next page you will name your blog. Choose something appropriate to your topic, such as "Spanish Golden Age Theatre" or "Ancient Greek Tragedy." Select the template set "Community blog." For the directory name, choose a keyword that all of you can remember such as somebody's last name.
4. On the next page you can enter a brief description of the blog and then save your general settings
5. Next, mouse over the "Manage" tab and select "Add Users" from the menu. In the pop-up window you'll be able to add each group member's email id and give each person access to the administrative functions of the blog. Note: Email ID does not include "@umn.edu." Will's email ID, for example, is dadda002
6. Add Will (dadda002) and Bryan (schm3474) as "authors" to your blog (so that we can comment on your posts)
7. Once your blog is up and running, go to the homepage, copy your blog's url, and email it to Will and Bryan. We will collate all the addresses and share them with the class.

Over the next few weeks you'll have to compose several blog entries, so I strongly recommend that you spend time familiarizing yourself with this particular blogging platform. Pay special attention to features like "Creating an entry," and "Additional Pages." This isn't rocket science, but every blogging platform has its own peculiarities so please take time to learn your way around UThink.

Journaling on the blog

In addition to the exercises assigned each week in class, I expect each member of every group to use the blog platform as a space to journal about the research process. You can set up a page for each person within your group's blog. Each group member must write one blog entry per week (a total of 4 blog entries). These weekly journal entries can eventually take any form, but, for the first couple of entries, I'd like you to address these basic categories:

1. In terms of this research project, what have you been thinking about this week?
2. If you have undertaken any research, what did you discover?
3. How might you relate this research to your work in other classes or rehearsal?

¹ My blog: http://blog.lib.umn.edu/dadda002/theatre_history/

Weekly Assignments

****Preliminary Step: Set up Group Blog****

Assignment #1: Narrow your scope

The topic “Spanish Golden Age” is too broad. All of these topics are too broad. Your first task as a group is to narrow down your presentation topic to a specific time, place, and artist. To do this, you’ll have to get a good sense of the major names within your topic, and/or determine what aspect of the topic scholars have focused on the most (or the least).

Advice for how to do this:

1. Theatre history textbooks are a good place to start. There are a lot of these. The library has several on its shelves and in their online databases (you can access multiple books online through the library’s website). As you turn to these books, however, be aware of how each book categorizes its information. Look for gaps in the narratives offered by these books as well as for the information that speaks directly to your topic.
2. Scholarly Journals: Use JSTOR, EBSCO, Project Muse, and the other databases to locate articles about your topic. For example, find five articles, divide them among your group, and then report back to each other about what you find.

Due: By noon on Saturday, November 10, you must post a proposal on your group’s blog.

This proposal must contain the following information:

1. What specific time period do you plan to research?
2. What artist(s) and/or work(s) do you plan to focus on specifically?
3. What social and/or political events are happening at the time you are investigating? (For example, in Johnson’s study of Terence he points to the issues of slavery in Ancient Rome. When we discussed Aphra Behn we looked at the introduction of women to the stage and the issues of female empowerment that were surfacing in seventeenth-century England.)
4. Briefly describe *how* you reached consensus on the scope of your group project.
5. What materials did you consult to help you make your decision (you must cite these sources using the correct MLA citation format and begin to create a bibliography that you will eventually annotate)

This proposal must do two things: 1.) It must reveal the work you’ve done to make your decision. 2.) It must begin to map a research agenda that will bring your final presentation to fruition. After you post your proposal, Bryan and I will offer feedback about whether or not your refined scope presents a manageable research agenda. If it does, we’ll give you the “ok.” If your focus still seems too wide, we will offer some suggestions for narrowing your scope further and you’ll have to resubmit your proposal.

Assignment #2: Format of the Presentation

Before you can continue your research, you need to have some idea about the form your presentation will take. For example, do you want to create a performance, a lecture, a site-specific journey, a ritual event, or a combination of these things?

If you create a performance:

What will it look like?

Will you borrow formal elements from the object of your study?

What are the ethical implications of such an act of borrowing?

How will you assist your classmates in thinking critically about the performance?

How will ensure that you stay within the 20-minute time period?

If you plan to give a lecture, you should brainstorm as many details about the form of that lecture as possible. Consider these questions:

How can you present textual and visual materials in an engaging way?

How do you structure an argument collectively?

How do you make sure your ideas are landing with your audience?

Whatever form you choose for your presentation, you must think it through and allow for the possibility that your research will make you change your mind.

Advice for how to go about answering these questions:

1. Discuss the notion of pedagogical efficacy: based on your classroom experiences, what kinds of in-class lectures or activities have interested you the most?
2. Consider the various presentations that you've experienced, whether they were in school or elsewhere. Borrow elements from those experiences.

Due: By the end of class on Tuesday, November 13, you must determine a rough sketch of the form your presentation will take. **Your group must post this sketch on your blog by 5 pm.**

This sketch must contain the following element:

1. A short paragraph that describes the form of your presentation and discusses how and why you decided to choose this form.

(If you make your decision quickly, you may move on to Assignment #3: Divide and Conquer)

Assignment #3: Divide and Conquer: Building an Annotated Bibliography

Once you have narrowed your scope and decided the format of your final presentation, you can begin to determine your presentation's argument. Before you can do this, however, you need to research and read.

If your topic does not have much written about it in English (for example, Scandinavian Theatre), then your group will probably be able to read complete books and get your hands on a large percentage of the extant literature. If your topic is huge (for example, Elizabethan theatre), then you have the opposite problem; you will have to sift through massive amounts of literature and decide what to read.

In either case, your task now is to divide and conquer: develop a pool of resources that will provide your group with the information that will form the basis of your presentation, and then assign certain sources to specific members of your group. As each group member researches, he/she must develop summaries of the articles, chapters, visual materials, and other sources he/she discovers. A summary in this case is 250-word synopsis of the main ideas presented by each source. In the case of visual materials, the individual should write 250 words about the information that a specific visual source (artwork, architecture, stained glass, etc.) provides about the topic at hand. Each group must include the summaries within the bibliography listed on the group's blog. Correct MLA citation of each source + these summaries = an annotated bibliography. All members of the class will be able to use these bibliographies in the future to investigate different areas of theatre history. (Note: you should create a new page on your blog for the annotated bibliography.)

After you divide the source material among the members of your group, you must collectively synthesize that information in order to determine your argument. When you bring your individual research together, **you must collectively answer these questions and post them on your blog by Sunday, November 18 at 5pm:**

1. Based on what you've read, what contextual information must your group necessarily communicate to the class in order to help us better understand the theatrical material you plan to discuss?
2. How does your topic express the philosophies, ideologies, political circumstances, and/or social movements occurring in the specific time and place you are investigating?
3. Given that you only have 20 minutes to present, what big ideas/contextual elements will you have to leave out?

Assignment #4: Sculpt!

By Tuesday, November 20, your group should be ready to sculpt your presentation. Think of this sculpting as rehearsal, but not as a dress rehearsal. In other words, you aren't ready to practice the entire presentation yet. You still have to discuss some issues amongst yourselves; namely:

1. How can you assure that each member of the group participates in the presentation? How will the structure of your presentation highlight the work of each member?
2. What is the main idea you want to communicate to the class? Continuing the act of synthesis, you must consider how best to distill the complexity of your topic into an engaging and informative presentation. How can you ensure that you will provide your classmates with insights into your particular topic without drowning them in information?
3. Next, revisit the intended format of your presentation. Will the format you've chosen enable you to communicate clearly your main idea? Do you need to re-think the format?

Whereas the bulk of your work so far has focused on *how* you research a given topic in theatre history, you also need to think about *what* you are saying to your classmates. In at least four sentences, propose an argument about your specific topic. If it helps, think back to the plays we covered in the first two-thirds of this semester (*Ajax*, *Ajax in Iraq*, *Atsumori*, *Toy Cart*, *Eunuch*, *School for Wives*, *Critique of the School for Wives*, and *The Lucky Chance*) and the scholars whose writing addressed those plays. Consider the arguments they made about the plays and theatrical movements under consideration and the arguments we posed in class (revisit your notes about these plays and articles). **Post your group's argument to your blog by Wednesday, November 21 at 5pm.**

Timeline

Week 10: Introduction to Final Projects

Tuesday, November 6

In Class: Introduce Guidelines and Goals of project; select topic; “Narrow your scope”

Assignment: Work on “Narrow your scope”

Thursday, November 8

In Class: “Narrow your scope”

Assignment: Post your group’s proposal to your blog by Noon on Saturday, November 10

Week 11: Work on Final Projects

Tuesday, November 13

In Class: “Format of the Presentation”

Assignment: Post sketch of final presentation format to your blog by 5pm today

Thursday, November 15

In Class: “Divide and Conquer”

Assignment: Compile annotated bibliography and answer “synthesis” questions by Sunday, November 18 at 5pm. Post both on blog

Week 12: Work on Final Projects

Tuesday, November 20

In Class: “Sculpt!”

Assignment: Post your argument to your blog by Wednesday, Nov. 21 at 5pm

Thursday, November 22 [Thanksgiving—NO CLASS]

Week 13: Dress Rehearsal and Presentations

Tuesday, November 27

In Class: “Dress Rehearsal” of presentations

Assignment: Final preparations

Thursday, November 29

In Class: Group Presentations, Groups 1-5.

Assignment: Blog Reflections (each person must write a short paragraph about the presentations: what was interesting, what did you learn, what did you want to know more about?)

Week 14: Continue Presentations

Tuesday, December 4

In Class: Group Presentations, Groups 6-10

Assignment: Blog Reflections

Thursday, December 6

In Class: Group Presentations, Groups 11-15

Assignment: Blog Reflections

Week 15:

Tuesday, December 11

In Class: Evaluations and Course Wrap Up

Grade Breakdown

Process: 60%

- Narrow Your Scope: 12%
- Format of the Presentation: 12%
- Divide and Conquer (including bibliography): 12%
- Sculpt: 12%
- Individual Blogs: 12%
 - o You have to write 4 blog entries
 - o We'll have two "Check-In" dates when we read your blogs and assign you a grade. The first will be November 20. The second will be December 7. Note that the final blog entry must reflect on the final presentation
 - o To increase your grade after the first Check-In, follow the advice you receive from Will and Bryan
 - o The blog is the only assignment for which you will receive an individual grade

Product: 40%

- Final Presentation
 - o Your grade will be based on how well your group addresses the points outlined on the first two pages of this prompt. As such, revisit "Goals of the Research Project" and "Elements of the Presentation"