

TH729: Performance Theory for Dramaturgs

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
Spring 2012

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Coffee & Chat Hours: Mon 2:30-3:30pm, Tues 9-10am, or by appointment

CLASS MEETS

Wednesdays 1:25-2:10 Group Check In

2:15-4:00pm • FAC Room 112

COURSE OVERVIEW

This graduate level course is designed for students with an interest in dramaturgy as a critical exploration of performance theory. It complements practical and text-focused training with theoretical, historical, and contextual frameworks. The course is designed to familiarize students with Performance Theory and key theorists, as well as with the field of Performance Studies.

In this class, we will consider some of the important ways in which theatre/performance functions in human societies and will investigate the connections between theater/performance/theory from a selection of theoretical and historical perspectives that students can add to their dramaturgical toolboxes. Students will journal about how each unit under study might inform their practice as dramaturgs. Alongside the readings and journal entrees, we will also consider a range of texts, plays, performances, installations, and films.

We will start the course by expanding our definition of the object of our study (theatre) and moving beyond the proscenium arch to a more encompassing notion of "performance." This will also serve as a brief introduction to the field of Performance Studies. Next, we will also examine how we position ourselves as scholars of theatre/performance in relation to the objects we study and, using case studies, consider the politics and stakes of such positionings.

Next we will attend to theoretical frameworks, or "concerns," that apply to dramaturgs by thinking about theatre/performance in its various "contexts" (political, cultural, economic, historic, symbolic etc). We will cover the historical concerns of postcolonialism and Marxism, with attention to orientalism, othering and postcolonial theory. In our unit on cultural concerns, we will consider the potentials and pitfalls of interculturalism and performance ethnography. And in three units on political concerns, we will explore some of the lessons the Feminist and Civil Rights Movements have given us and how, why, and to what ends gender, race, and sexuality are performed, theorized, and practiced.

COURSE GOALS

By the end of the course, students will have:

- 1) enhanced research, analytical, and critical writing skills,

- 2) a working knowledge of some of the “key” theorists and theories associated with performance studies and performance theory and the ability to apply these ideas to your lives as working dramaturgs,
- 3) a knowledge of several case-studies to which these theories can be applied for deeper understanding,
- 4) an awareness of the ethics of positionality as it applies to our interventions as dramaturgs, and
- 5) a knowledge of the ways in which meaning is produced through both textual and performative discourses and the ability to analyze live performance and dramatic texts from a variety of critical and theoretical approaches.

COURSE MATERIALS

Readings. This is a reading-heavy course so plan your time accordingly. Some readings are densely theoretical while others require fewer mental gymnastics; some are from textbooks and others are the work of the field’s most prolific and interesting scholars. Make *time* to read. Find an effective reading space that isn’t your bed late at night, in front of the TV or other electronic media. I suggest reading along with a dictionary and looking up words as you encounter them.

Annotate the Readings. You should annotate and write marginalia 1) as you read, 2) as we discuss the readings, and 3) as you make connections across the course. Bring annotated copies with you to every class.

Viewings. At-home viewings will be required for some sessions. These visual materials will be hosted on our moodle site at: <https://moodle.umass.edu/>. We will also see all the Theater Dept productions this Spring (and others, should exciting options arise).

Journal. The old adage says that you are what you eat. Consider, then, that we are also what we write and think in. Buy yourself a journal in which you will record your thinking in this course. Think of it as a repository of your ideas, as your theory bible, as the space in which to record your thought-treasures. You may select whatever format you like; ideally, it should be inspiring to you and make you want to write in it. You might want to find one that also has a pocket in which to put any written or printed materials or is large enough to accommodate any clippings you want to paste in it. I recommend also buying writing implements that excite and motivate you.

ASSIGNMENTS

Engaged Participation. This is a graduate level course and you are expected to commit the required time and energy to your work in it. To successfully participate in this course, you will need to:

- Attend class and be on time
- Read all the materials on time and annotate materials as you read/watch
- Journal regularly throughout the course on ideas, thoughts, questions, connections etc.
- Prepare written answers to the weekly journal questions for the class in which they are due
- Meet all deadlines (if you foresee a problem, communicate with me about it *in advance*)
- Contribute to class discussions on a regular basis

- Engage in the discourse of this class by risking your opinions, remaining curious about the material and asking questions, and articulating your reactions to and interpretations of the materials we cover in a clear and professional manner

Thought Journals. The pressures of graduate school can mean that students seldom have time to simply reflect on their reading and research in a creative and unstructured way. Throughout the course, we will keep Thought Journals, a space in which you will capture thoughts, questions, juicy quotes, interesting ideas or clippings, reactions to shows or videos we see, ways in which you see theory applying to performance texts, yourselves as dramaturgs, or any other musings that occur to you while on this journey. It is a space to trace your thinking across time and your journal will serve as an archive of your thinking across the class. Make the journal you own – choose its style and format to best suit you and the way you think, organize materials, and the space in which you want to reflect and collect ideas. Decorate it, use inspiring pens, doodle in it, paste cuttings into it; whatever works for you. This will also be the space in which you ruminate on the weekly journal questions. In my review of your journals, I am not looking for any “right” answers or for already-attained expertise; rather, I am interested in how you think about, process, imagine, and articulate the ideas you encounter in this course.

Mini-Lectures. Two of the most important skills a dramaturgy can possess are the ability to articulate ideas effectively in public and to analyze and synthesize research into a coherent form that is useful to others. Across the course, you will be asked to make ONE oral presentation (mini-lectures) on theories/theorists that you choose. The purpose of your (30-minute maximum) presentation will be threefold:

- 1) to analyze the materials and make sense of their history, key concepts, terminology, and frameworks and to consider the potentials and pitfalls of the theory to your work as a dramaturg,
- 2) synthesizing the materials, to educate your audience about the theory under study through an effective oral presentation (using whatever supporting technologies you consider appropriate), and
- 3) to discover, imagine, and share ways in which the theory you discuss might apply to a text/performance (i.e. to your dramaturgical work).

Theory-in-Practice Paper. The only way theory ever makes sense is when it is used to explain or understand an object of study. In other words, theory makes sense *in practice*. Using a performance text of your choosing (and one you are reasonably familiar with), you will write an essay in which you apply at least TWO of the theories we discuss in class to help elucidate, interrogate, (re)imagine, fathom, or otherwise make sense of, the text. Your paper should articulate a clear thesis/argument and consist of deft analysis that demonstrates your understanding of the theories as they apply to your performance text. Your paper must conform to MLA Style, with standard parameters (12-point standard font, 1” margins, double-spaced.) Proofread, spell- and grammar-check your work before submitting it. NOTE: Should you wish to develop this paper for publication or a conference presentation, I will be glad to assist you in that process.

GRADING

Grading. Your grade is based on the following:

Engaged participation	20%
Journals	20%
Mini-Lecture	30%
Final paper	30%
Total	100%

Grading Scale:

A 100-93	A- 92-90	B+ 89-87	B 86-83	B- 82-80	
C+ 79-77	C 76-73	C- 72-70	D+ 69-67	D 66-60	F 59 0

A - achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.

B - achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.

C - achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.

D - achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.

S - achievement that is satisfactory, which is equivalent to a C- or better

F (or N) - Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

I - (Incomplete) Assigned at the discretion of the instructor when, due to extraordinary circumstances, e.g., hospitalization, a student is prevented from completing the work of the course on time. *Requires instructor consent and a student-instructor agreed upon plan developed prior to the end of the term.*

RESOURCES TO HELP YOUR LEARNING

The Writing Center

W.E.B. DuBois Library-Learning Commons

writingcenter@acad.umass.edu • 413.577.1293 • umass.edu/writingcenter/

Providing free writing instruction for all UMass students at all stages of the writing process.

Disability Services

161 Whitmore Admin. Bldg

ds@educ.umass.edu • 413.545.0892 • <http://www.umass.edu/disability/>

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), Learning Disabilities Support Services (LDSS), or Psychological Disabilities Services (PDS), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements.

University Computer Help Line

www.oit.umass.edu/support • Help Desk: 413-545-9400

For all your computer and technical questions.

Performance and Theatre Librarian

Our local expert at the W.E.B. DuBois Library is James R. Kelly <jrkelly@library.umass.edu>

COURSE SCHEDULE

(Subject to adjustment)

Week 1 • January 25

Introduction/Welcome/Syllabus Review

Concept Mapping

Why Theory?

- Excerpts from Augusto Boal. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985).
- Prof. Barbara McManus (College of New Rochelle)'s "Outline of Aristotle's Theory of Tragedy in the *POETICS*."

Journal questions: Write about your relationship to theory. Do you have any ideas, coming into this class, about what it is, isn't, should, can, cannot be? Mark your familiarity with any theories as well as those you want to know more about. Start considering which theories you think might be most useful to you and your research, scholarly, and dramaturgical interests.

Jan. 31 - Feb. 3, 2011

See "The Tailor of Inverness" in *The Curtain Theater*

Week 2 • February 1

PERFORMANCE: DEFINITIONS & PRACTICES

- Carlson, Marvin, "What is Performance?" in *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader*. 2nd ed. Michael Huxley and Noel Witts eds. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 146-153.
- Richard Schechner. "What is performance?" *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 28-51.
Excerpt from: Marco De Marinis. "The Performance Text" in *The Performance Studies Reader*, 2nd edition, Henry Bial, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 232-3.
- Johan Huizinga. "The Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon" in *The Performance Studies Reader*, 2nd edition, Henry Bial, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 117-120.
- Harvard Performance Studies Guide.

Journal questions: What is performance, according to Carlson, Schechner, De Marinis, Huizinga, Goffman, et al? How might their definitions differ or coincide with your definitions of theatre? How might expanding the lens impact the work you do as dramaturgs?

Week 3 • February 8

POSITIONING OURSELVES I

- D. Soyini Madison, "Introduction to Critical Ethnography: Theory and Method" in *Critical Ethnography: method, ethics, and performance* Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2005, p. 1-16.

- Tracy C. Davis. "Introduction: the pirouette, detour, revolution, deflection, deviation, tack, and yaw of the performative turn" in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies* (2008), p. 1-8.
- Dwight Conquergood. "Performance Studies: Interventions and radical research" in *The Performance Studies Reader*, 2nd edition, Henry Bial, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 311-322.

Journal questions: What do Davis, Madison, and Conquergood tell us about how we approach the objects that we study? What are the potentials and pitfalls of our relationship to work we encounter? Consider their ideas on positionality, ethics, voice, bodies, power, privilege, Eurocentrism, and the primacy of the text. Where, and how, do you see their ideas applying to you as a working dramaturg?

Mini-Lecture 1: _____

Week 4 • February 15 POSITIONING OURSELVES II

- At-home screening: Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *The couple in the cage: A Guatinali Odyssey*, Authentic Documentary Productions; directed & produced by Coco Fusco, Paula Heredia. New York, NY: Third World Newsreel (on moodle).
- Diana Taylor, "Acts of Transfer" in *The archive and the repertoire: performing cultural memory in the Americas*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 1-52.
- Guillermo Gómez-Peña. "CULTURAS-IN-EXTREMIS: Performing against the cultural backdrop of the mainstream bizarre" in *The Performance Studies Reader*, 2nd edition, Henry Bial, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 287-298.

Journal questions: What are the archive and repertoire Taylor speaks of and how might they be useful to you as dramaturgs? What are the stakes of staging others/conquest, especially in relation to (but not limited to) Theatre in/of the Americas? What interventions to Fusco and Gómez-Peña deploy to ask audience to rethink their positionality? What are the ethics of performance ethnography for working dramaturgs?

WRITING PROGRESS: Select a topic for your final Theory-in-Practice essay.

Mini-Lecture 2: _____

Week 5 • February 22 HISTORICAL CONCERNS I: After Colonialism

- Lois Tyson. "Postcolonial criticism" in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 417-449.
- Watch Prof. Sut Jhally's lecture on Edward Said and Orientalism (on moodle)
- Read Aime Cesaire's *Une Tempete/A Tempest* (on moodle)
- Watch *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) by Gillo Pontecorvo (on moodle)

Journal questions: What are the key tenets of postcolonial theory and why are they important? What might the value be—to you as dramaturgs—of having a critical awareness of orientalism, othering, and postcolonial theory? How do you see the theory operating in the two performance texts of the week: Cesaire’s play and Pontecorvo’s film?

WRITING PROGRESS: Formulate research questions for your Theory-in-Practice essay and begin doing research.

Mini-Lecture 3: _____

Week 6 • February 29

HISTORICAL CONCERNS II: After Marx

- Lois Tyson. “Marxist criticism” in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 53-80.
- Watch *Theater of War* (2008) by John Walter (on moodle)
- Read *St. Joan of the Stockyards* (1929-31) by Bertolt Brecht (on moodle)

Journal questions: Having familiarized yourself with Marxism, how do you see his ideas at play/at work/informing Brecht’s work? Tie threads together from Brecht’s play, the theoretical reading, and the film in your analysis. NOTE: After seeing “Urinetown,” consider the ways in which Marx’s legacy informs that contemporary musical.

March 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10 at 8 p.m., March 3 and 10 at 2 p.m.
See “Urinetown” in The Rand Theater

WRITING PROGRESS: Develop a working bibliography for your final Theory-in-Practice essay.

Mini-Lecture 4: _____

Week 7 • March 7

CULTURAL CONCERNS

- Phillip B Zarrilli. “For Whom Is the King a King? Issues of Intercultural Production, Perception, and Reception in a *Kathakali King Lear*” in *Critical Theory and Performance*, Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach eds. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 9-40 (includes introductory essay on Cultural Studies by Roach).
- Julianne Burton. “Don (Juanito) Duck and the Imperial-Patriarchal Unconscious: Disney Studies, the Good Neighbor Policy, and the Packaging of Latin America.” In *Nationalisms and Sexualities*. Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Summer and Patricia Yaeger eds. (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 21-41.
- Wole Soyinka. “Theatre in African Traditional Cultures: Survival Patterns.” In *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader*. 2nd ed. Michael Huxley and Noel Witts eds. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 372-385.

Journal questions: What do these readings suggest to you about the power dynamics of staging “culturally-laden” performances? About how we think of, frame, and understand ourselves and

others as we stage plays and curate seasons? How might they relate to issues of positionality we discussed earlier? What applications for this theory can you suggest for your dramaturgical work?

WRITING PROGRESS: Write an outline and a writing plan of your Theory-in-Practice essay.

Mini-Lecture 5: _____

Week 8 • March 14
WRITING WORKSHOP I

We will use this class to work on writing issues and prepare for your Theory-in-Practice final essays. Bring notes, ideas, outlines, drafts etc to class to workshop.

Week 9 • Spring Recess (March 17-25, 2012)

Week 10 • March 28
POLITICAL CONCERNS: GENDER

- Judith Butler. "Performative acts and gender constitution: an essay in phenomenology and feminist theory" in *The Performance Studies Reader*, 2nd edition, Henry Bial, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 154-166.
- Lois Tyson. "Feminist criticism" in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 83-131.
- Bryce Traister. "Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies." *American Quarterly* 52:2, June 2000, p. 274-304.

Journal questions: How is gender performed, according to Butler? What are the stakes of staging gendered bodies? How are gendered bodies marked, labeled, read and interpreted? What meaning do they carry and how do they perform/enact/(re)iterate/articulate/embody their gender identities? Why might it be (is it?) important to look at constructions/performances of both masculinities and femininities in your work as dramaturgs?

WRITING PROGRESS: Work on your Theory-in-Practice essay...

Mini-Lecture 6: _____

Week 11 • April 4
POLITICAL CONCERNS: RACE/ETHNICITY

- Henry Louis Gates, "The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique on the Sign and the Signifying Monkey" in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Julie Rivkin & Michael Ryan eds. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 987-1004.
- Lisa Lowe. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences" in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Julie Rivkin & Michael Ryan eds. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 1031-1050.

- Ruth Frankenberg. "Introduction: Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness" in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p.1-33.

Journal questions: How are performance and "signifying" (Henry Louis Gates) related? What are the stakes of staging racially- or ethnically-marked bodies? How are these bodies marked, labeled, read and interpreted? What meaning do they carry and how do they perform/enact/(re)iterate/articulate/embody their racial identities? What is the value in studying whiteness in addition to "of color-ness" and how might this work apply to dramaturgy?

April 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 at 8 p.m., April 7 and 14 at 2 p.m.
See "Beyond the Horizon" in *The Curtain Theater*

Journal question: After seeing the devised work of "Beyond the Horizon," how might any of the theory we've covered help you digest this work?

WRITING PROGRESS: Work on your Theory-in-Practice essay...

Mini-Lecture 7: _____

Week 12 • April 11

POLITICAL CONCERNS: SEXUALITY

- E. Patrick Johnson. "Queer Theory" in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies* (2008), p. 166-181.
- Jill Dolan. "Practicing Cultural Disruptions: Gay and Lesbian Representation and Sexuality" in *Critical Theory and Performance*, Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach eds. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 263-275.
- Watch *Ncamisa: The Women!* By Pam Ngwabeni (screening based on our mutual schedules)

Journal questions: What is "queer" theory? What are the stakes of staging queer bodies and how are they marked, labeled, read and interpreted? What meaning do they carry and how do they perform/enact/(re)iterate/articulate/embody their queerness?

WRITING PROGRESS: By now you should have a first draft of your Theory-in-Practice essay.

Mini-Lecture 8: _____

Week 13 • April 18

DAY OF REFLECTION

We will use this class to mark our journeys, clarify muddy points, raise questions, tie threads together...Bring your journals to class.

Journal question: Reflecting on the three units we just completed, how might your understandings of Critical Race, Gender, and Queer Theory help you in your work as dramaturgs?

April 19, 20, 21, 26, 27, 28 at 8 p.m., April 21 and 28 at 2 p.m.
See "A Midsummer Nights Dream" in The Rand Theater

Week 14 • April 25
WRITING WORKSHOPS II

We will use this class to work on writing issues and finalize your Theory-in-Practice final essays.
Bring a printed copy of your paper draft to class to workshop.

Social Hour After Class

Week 15 • May 2
Final Papers Due by 5pm
(via email to Prof. Lewis)