

THDN 233 — Critical Views / Critical Values

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Office Hours: Fri 1:00 – 3:00 PM or by appt.

Fall 2020

Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:00 – 3:30 PM

Virtual Course



COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why are we profoundly moved by a particular performance we see? Why are we perplexed? Or disturbed? What is going on in a performance that we should understand in order to come to terms with our own values about art? How do we contextualize our personal responses to performance within the sociocultural values assigned to certain performance styles and approaches? And how have others come to such terms? These are the questions that students will consider as they examine a broad array of critical perspectives on performances both present and past as a means to developing their own criteria for critical elevation.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand an artwork's significance within its own time period and culture
- Synthesize and analyze texts authored by scholars, critics, spectators, and artists in response to trends within a movement or when engaging a specific performance
- Articulate their own responses to a performance-based artwork
- Recognize the characteristics of various performance practices (i.e. theater, performance art, social justice, movement, etc.)
- Critically evaluate the role of performance in the formation of personal, social, and culture identities
- Effectively communicate original analysis in both oral and written forms

DEPARTMENT LEARNING GOALS

As a core course for the Theater and Dance major, I am also including the department learning goals here so that majors or perspective majors understand how their experiences in this class are aimed at fulfilling specific aspects of your degree's concentration:

1. Develop the ability to think critically and work creatively across disciplines
2. Develop the body as an articulate vehicle for expression
3. Become critical readers of complex texts
4. Develop research and analytical skills
5. Learn and practice effective strategies for working both independently and collaboratively
6. Develop artistic literacy
7. Develop the ability to communicate clearly, coherently, and effectively in written and oral expression
8. Cultivate the ability to make informed ethical judgments
9. Acquire knowledge of diverse cultural traditions and global perspectives

COURSE TEXTS

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1966 film) dir. Mike Nichols – Available for rent or purchase on Amazon

All other assigned texts, media, and other materials for class will be provided on Moodle.

COURSE POLICIES & RESOURCES

Course Structure

My approach to this virtual course is informed by my experience teaching over Zoom last spring. I expect there to be growing pains and the need for shifts and changes based on how you are responding to the course or if there is a change in situation related to the COVID-19 public health crisis. I ask that you be both forthcoming with your feedback and flexible during the first few weeks of the semester. If a major change to the course structure needs to occur, I will communicate and discuss options with you as far in advance as possible.

Synchronous class work

Discussions, Guest Speakers, Student Presentations – I find that synchronous commitments (i.e. times when we all log onto Zoom at the same time) are best used to conduct work that cannot be done during other parts of our week. Therefore, the dates and times dedicated for this class – Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:00 – 3:30 PM EST – will be dedicated to discussions about the course materials facilitated by myself, appearances by guest speakers, and student presentations (described below).

Final Dramaturgy Projects – During our final class meeting, each student will present a 3-5-minute summary of their research for the dramaturgy project up until November 12.

Non-synchronous class work

Lectures – Because our synchronous meetings will be focused on discussion and presentations, the lectures I prepare for each class meeting will be recorded and posted to Moodle no less than 3 days before we log in to discuss that topic. For example, the lecture notes for our class on Tuesday, Sept. 15 will be posted to Moodle by the evening of Sept. 12. View the lectures ahead of the class meeting and jot down questions that arise.

Assigned Readings & Media – All plays, articles, films, podcasts, and other media should be completed *before* you watch the recorded lectures and attend class.

Writing Assignments and Presentation Prep – I expect you to dedicate a significant portion of non-Zoom time to completing assignments. Please reach out to me if you want to discuss any aspect of the class or your assignments.

Communication

Given that we are not able to connect in-person this semester, I ask that you be in communication with me via email or Zoom office hours if you have any questions, concerns, challenges, or interests that arise as the semester progresses. I will do my best to reply to all emails within 24 hours. I want to make sure you get the most out of this class as possible, and your perspective on the course is welcomed and appreciated.

It is important that you check your e-mail and Moodle regularly. If you do not use your Trinity e-mail account, please make sure that you have your Trinity e-mails forwarded to your personal account.

Conduct

Because this course includes a significant amount of discussion, it is important that we are mindful of how we engage with one another in discourse. I ask that we be open to critique and feedback, and that we give one another the space to grow and make mistakes. Be sure to share “airtime” with all your peers and direct your comments and questions to your peers and not just to me.

Attendance and Tardiness

Be on time to our virtual meetings. Students are expected to attend all class meetings. More information about how attendance affects your overall course grade can be found in the assignments section below.

Illnesses and Excused Absences

If you cannot attend Zoom class because of a medical or personal emergency, please let me know as far in advance as possible via email. Any absences that are not communicated to me ahead of time will affect your grade.

Academic Guidelines and Resources

Assignments are due when stated. Be sure you proofread your work before you turn it in. Plagiarism of any kind or amount will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the assignment and further repercussions as deemed necessary. Please see me if you have ANY questions concerning citations. When in doubt, cite your source.

If you are seeking assistance in constructing your writing assignments, free assistance is available through the Writing Center. For further information, see: <https://www.trincoll.edu/writing-center/writing-center/>. If you need to schedule a writing center eTutoring or online appointment, visit <https://trincoll.mywconline.com/index.php?logout=YES>.

Accommodations

Both I and the College are committed to creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students with disabilities who may need some accommodation in order to fully participate in this class are urged to contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center, as soon as possible, to explore what arrangements need to be made to assure access. If you have approval for academic accommodations, please notify me by the end of week two of classes. For those students with accommodations approved after the start of the semester, a minimum of 10 days’ notice is required. Please be sure to meet with me privately to discuss implementation. Student Accessibility Resources can be reached by emailing Lori.Clapis@trincoll.edu or SARC@trincoll.edu.

INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES

This course adheres to all the College's policies governing student conduct. Website links are provided below. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding these policies.

Academic Integrity & Intellectual Honesty

Page 10: <https://www.trincoll.edu/SiteCollectionDocuments/StudentHandbook.pdf>

Sexual Misconduct

<https://www3.trincoll.edu/SiteCollectionDocuments/Policy-on-Sexual-Misconduct.pdf>

Accommodations for students with documented disabilities and/or medical emergencies

Pages 65-68: <https://www.trincoll.edu/SiteCollectionDocuments/StudentHandbook.pdf>

ASSIGNMENTS

PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE – 20%

As stated above, your attendance at all discussion-centered class meetings (Tues/Thurs 2:00-3:30pm) is mandatory.

You will need to be familiar with all the materials assigned for each class and to have reviewed the recorded lecture to be *actively* engaged in our class discussions over Zoom. For each class meeting, the readings will be an average of 1 play/performance as well as 1 reading, short film, podcast, or other materials. The recorded lecture will be between 30-45 minutes. Allow yourself ample time to complete the assignments and to digest the key concepts within them. Have notes on, questions about, or memorable quotes from the assignments ready. This will greatly enhance your ability to express opinions and arguments both in class and when generating your various projects throughout the semester.

CRITICAL RESPONSE QUESTIONS – 20% (2 QUESTIONS @ 10% EACH)

Each student will choose one of the readings or assigned media for which they will serve as a critical respondent. On the day we are scheduled to discuss that material, you will prepare two complex, well-crafted questions to “get the ball rolling” on our full-class discussion of the materials. Prior to posing the questions to the class, you will give a brief (2-3-minute) summary of your reactions to and interpretation of the chosen text/media. You are welcome to use slides or other presentation materials, though it is not required. An initial draft of your discussion questions must be submitted to me via email 24 hours prior to the class meeting so I can provide any necessary feedback. I am also happy to meet with you the week before your presentation to share what I am planning to provide in my lecture notes and key concepts to look for in your navigation of the materials. **Be ready to choose your desired reading/media by September 10.**

MIDTERM PRESENTATION & SUMMARY –30%

Based on a topic of your own choosing, prepare a 5-minute presentation that articulates your critical evaluation of a performance work. You can focus on any number of performance types – plays, dance, video art, fashion, drag, etc. – available to you online. Your presentation should not only include a summarization of what the performance was about, narratively and thematically, but expand to include your interpretation of the work’s value as well as theories about what the performance might be aiming to communicate or provoke within an audience or the public at large. You should also draw on at least one theorist we have explored thus far in the semester to address notions of authorial intent, performance as instructive or destructive, and subjectivity. Slides or other visual materials are strongly recommended. In addition to the presentation, you will also submit a 2-3-page summary of your research that 1) summarizes the work you chose; 2) offers your interpretation of the work’s value and impact; 3) connects your evaluation with at least one concepts and theorist discussed thus far in the semester. **Presentations are to take place during our synchronous class meeting on October 13. The written portion is due to me the same day by 11:59PM.**

DRAMATURGY PROJECT (30%)

The final project for this course asks that you put together a dramaturg’s portfolio for a performance piece or film of your choice. As a dramaturg, your main focus is on researching the work’s origins, social and cultural impact, reception by the public, and critical responses to the work. As you complete your research on the topic, choose three critical appraisals of the work that you think are the most insightful and useful examples of serious criticism available about this piece/film. The portfolio you put together includes: 1) an annotated bibliography with minimum 5 sources; 2) a 6-8-page paper that argues for the usefulness of the critical responses you focus on; 3) complete and correct citations (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.) within the paper; and 4) any images, video clips, songs, etc. that you think will add to the reader’s understanding of the work and the responses you focus on in the essay. A full rubric will be provided by October 15 and students are expected to submit their chosen performance piece or film by October 22. **The last class meeting of term – November 12 – will be dedicated to sharing your research for this project and for your peers to provide suggestions and feedback. The final project is due on December 15 by 11:59PM via email.**

GRADING

The grade distribution for this course is as follows:

- Participation and Attendance – 20%
- Critical Response Questions – 20% (10% for each question)
- Midterm Presentation & Summary – 30%
- Dramaturgy Project – 30%

Grading criteria and a complete rubric for each assignment will be provided in advance.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Tues. September 8 – Introduction and Expectations

- Introductions, brief overview of the course structure, syllabus, and expectations
- Explanation of assignments and due dates

Thurs. September 10 – What is the value of criticism?

- Reviews of *Angels in America* by Ben Brantley
- Review of *Slave Play* by Sarah Holdren and Taylor Barfield
- One review of choice from Boston Stage Notes blog

Be ready to select your choice for the critical response assignment

Tues. September 15 – Historical Underpinnings: Let's go back to basics

- Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*
- Aristotle, Excerpts from *The Poetics*

Critical Respondent(s):

Thurs. September 17 – Historical Underpinnings: Neoclassical rule-makers & -breakers

- Pierre Corneille, *Le Cid*
- Georges de Scudéry, "Observations on *Le Cid*" (1637)
- Corneille, "Apologetic Letter" (1637)
- Académie Française, "The Opinions of the French Academy" (1638)

Critical Respondent(s):

Tues. September 22 – Historical Underpinnings: Everyone's a critic, even of Shakespeare

- *The Tempest* (2010 film), dir. by Julie Taymor
- Goethe, excerpts from "Shakespeare: A Tribute" (1771)
- Goethe, excerpts from "Shakespeare: Once Again" (1813/16)

Critical Respondent(s):

Thurs. September 24 – Opinions, Opinions I: The Functions of Modern Criticism

- Noël Carroll, "Criticism as Evaluation," from *On Criticism*
- Michael Kirby, "The Critical Screen," from *A Formalist Theatre*

Critical Respondent(s):

Tues. September 29 – Opinions, Opinions II: Authorial Intention & Spectator Subjectivity

- David K. Rod, “The Problem of Subjectivity in Value Judgement” from *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (1988)
- Monroe Beardsley and W.K. Wimsatt, “The Intentional Fallacy” from *The Verbal Icon*

Guest Speaker: James Wilkinson – playwright and critic

Critical Respondent(s):

Thurs. October 1 – No More Masterpieces

- Anton Artaud, “No More Masterpieces” and “Theatre of Cruelty: First Manifesto” and “Theatre of Cruelty: Second Manifesto” from *The Theatre and Its Double*
- Video of *The Trojan Women* from the La MaMa ETC archives
- Early press coverage of *The Trojan Women* from the La MaMa archives

Critical Respondent(s):

Tues. October 6 – Desperate Times Call for Anti-Classical Measures

- Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*
- Bertolt Brecht, “A Short Organum for the Theater”
- Walter Benjamin, excerpts from “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”

Critical Respondent(s):

Thurs. October 8 – “What makes Albee run?”

- Edward Albee, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966 film), dir. by Mike Nichols
- Richard Schechner, “*Who’s Afraid of Edward Albee*” from *TDR* (1963)

Critical Respondent(s):

Tues. October 13 – Midterm Presentations

Written portion due by 11:59 PM via email

Thurs. October 15 – Arguments for Authorial Intent

- Adrienne Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*
- Kennedy, Excerpt from *People Who Led to My Plays*

Critical Respondent(s):

Tues. October 20 – Fit into the Cannon or Explode It?

- Marsha Norman, *'night, Mother*
- Jill Dolan, “Feminism and the Cannon: The Question of Universality” from *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*

Critical Respondent(s):

Thurs. October 22 – Postmodern Narrative Strategies in Response to Trauma

- Tony Kushner, *Angels in America Part I: Millennium Approaches*
- Nelson Pressley, “Introduction” and “The Case of Kushner” from *American Playwrighting and Anti-Political Prejudice*

Critical Respondent(s):

Submit topic for final dramaturgy project via email

Tues. October 27 – Performance as Critique: Dramatist Response to Racism in Theater

- David Henry Hwang, *Yellow Face*
- Sylvie Drake, “Cancellation of ‘Miss Saigon’ Plays as a Tragedy,” *Los Angeles Times*
- Michael Paulson, “The Battle of ‘Miss Saigon’: Yellowface, Art and Opportunity,” *The New York Times*

Critical Respondent(s):

Thurs. October 29 – Debate as Performance: When Criticism Becomes the Main Event

- Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman* (1966 film), dir. by Anthony Harvey
- August Wilson, “The Ground on Which I Stand,” as it appeared in *American Theater*
- Audio from “On Cultural Power” debate between Wilson & Robert Brustein (1997)

Critical Respondent(s):

Tues. November 3 – Performance Art Critiques of Spectatorship & Colonialism

- Video of Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Couple in The Cage: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West*
- Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” from *TDR* (1994)
- Leticia Robles-Moreno, ““Please, Don’t Discover Me!” On the Year of the White Bear” from The Walker Arts Center (2018)

Critical Respondent(s):

Thurs. November 5 – Subverting and Re-Imagining Assumptions & Cultural Values

- YouTube videos of artist Vaginal Crème Davis' *That Fertile Feeling*
- José Esteban Muñoz, excerpts from *Disidentification*

Critical Respondent(s):

Tues. November 10 – Athlete Activism on the National, Mediatized Stage

- *Episode V – Air Jordon, the Icon* from ESPN's *The Last Dance* – Available on Netflix
- Howard Bryant, excerpts from *The Heritage: Black Athletes, A Divided America, and the Politics of Patriotism*
- Harvey Young, excerpts from *Embodying Black Experience*

Critical Respondent(s):

Thurs. November 12 – Dramaturgy project presentations

No written work due but be prepared to offer feedback to your peers

Tuesday, December 15: Dramaturgy projects due

Submit complete portfolio by 11:59 PM via email