

Theatre 3205G: History of Performance Theory

Winter 2018

T 3:30-4:30; Th 2:30-4:30 (AHB 1B04)

1. Course Description

Theory is not just a thing from the past, or a thing from elsewhere; it's a living practice, something that happens right here and right now. It comes from what we believe, and what we want to make happen; what we hope for, and what we do.

In this class, we will read a range of historical performance theory, but also some contemporary work – work that is moving the disciplines of Theatre and Performance Studies forward right now. We'll think about what motivates historical theorists to propose the ideas they do, and how their ideas are taken up, challenged, and changed by contemporary writers.

To guide our reading and shape our thinking about it, we will focus on this main research question: **why is performance theory *always so political*?**

2. Meet your Teaching Team!

Instructor: Kim Solga (ksolga@uwo.ca; 519-661-2111 x80118)

Kim's office and hours:

AHB 3G14; Skype = solgakim

Tuesday 11-12, Thursday 4:30-5:30, Wednesday 1-2*

*T and Th office hours are in Kim's campus office. Wednesday office hours are on Skype – please email Kim for an appointment no later than the day before.

A NOTE ABOUT EMAIL: Kim doesn't check her UWO email on weekends! Any messages received after 6pm on Friday will be addressed first thing Monday morning. This ALSO means that *nothing* for our class is so urgent that you need to worry about it over the weekend – weekends are for self-care. Enjoy them!

3. Our course on the web

We will use OWL, but only for the basics: written assignment submission; announcements and messages; returning assignments and logging grades.

For everything else, we will use <https://performancetheoryatwestern.wordpress.com> – *you will want to find and bookmark this site now!*

Our Wordpress site is where Kim will post class notes and queries, where we can talk with one another about challenging ideas, and where we will post some of our class work. The site is public (that is, anyone can find it), but it's not coded using metadata (that is, it's not easily searchable by strangers). It's important that we remember the public nature of the site whenever we post to it, but don't be too worried about being spammed or trolled. If that happens, Kim will step in to make sure we are all safe.

4. Objectives and Outcomes

An outcome is a (sometimes abstract) thing we would like to take away from our course, at the end of the term. An objective is a (more concrete) thing we will do to make an outcome happen.

Outcomes

Students who take our course seriously and commit to our shared labour can expect to:

- Develop a good sense of some of the key issues and debates in performance theory history;
- Develop a good sense of some of the key issues and debates in performance theory today;
- Learn to apply performance theory to performance practice in concrete ways;
- Develop and/or hone their collaborative (team-work) skills;
- Develop and/or hone their oral presentation skills;
- Improve their writing and editing skills;
- Take some risks, make some useful mistakes, and have fun.

Objectives

In order to achieve the above outcomes, students should expect to:

- Read one substantive theoretical article per week;
- Encounter difficult ideas, and work through them (together);
- Work regularly in small pairs and groups;
- Write regularly both in and after class, both for grades and not for grades;
- Watch and discuss performance both live and online, thinking about that work in conjunction with our theoretical readings;
- Create one in-class performance;
- Try theory-writing on for size, themselves. (No, really!)

5. Required Texts

Daniel Gerould, *Theatre/Theory/Theatre* (this is in the bookstore, and also on reserve)

This is the only book I will ask you to buy. Select other readings will be provided, free of charge, via Course Reserves on OWL. We will also be watching some theatre online, and visiting The Grand to see *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. **You will be responsible for booking your own ticket – see OWL for complete details!**

6. Assessment

The Basics

Your grade in TS3205G will consist of the following parts:

- ✓ Three “Study Guide” contributions (roughly 500 words each; 3x5% = 15%)
- ✓ In-class group performance project (10 minutes; 15%)
- ✓ Written performance analysis (1000 words; 15%)
- ✓ Extension exercise (or, Write Your Own Bit Of Theory) (1000 words; 15%)
- ✓ Participation (10%)
- ✓ Final exam (30%)*

*This is a lot. That’s why we will be making a study guide! And why we will build the final exam together. (Really.)

Your due dates are as follows:

- ✓ Three “Study Guide” contributions (individual dates chosen in class on 11 January; **via OWL during your chosen week**, then uploaded to the class site)
- ✓ In-class group performance project (groups and performance dates assigned by Kim on 11 January)
- ✓ Written performance analysis (**Friday 16 February** by 11:55pm, via OWL)
- ✓ Extension exercise (**Friday 30 March** by 11:55pm, via OWL)

The Specifics

**Kim, how will we be marked? Check OWL (go to the assignment portal, and click on each assignment) for assessment rubrics for each assignment below.*

THREE STUDY GUIDE CONTRIBUTIONS

For this task, you will select three readings on which to base your contributions, from anywhere in the class schedule. (We will do this together on 11 January.) For each contribution, you will do the following things:

1. identify three key ideas from the reading. There may be more than that, but just select three. Note that your ideas may be linked; this is ok.
2. summarize each idea in a bullet point; then identify a key quotation from the reading about this idea, and include it in your bullet point summary. (In other words: each bullet point contains a summary from YOU, and a quotation.)
3. locate a short example of practice (that is, of some kind of performance) from the world around you – maybe from YouTube, from the theatre or cinema, from something you’ve read in another class, or from somewhere else – and connect it to one or two of the ideas you’ve identified in your chosen reading. In other words: use it, briefly, to illustrate something key you see in the reading.

Each contribution should be no more than 500 words in total; your third item (illustrating your chosen idea(s) through practice) should be 250-300 words.

2. IN-CLASS GROUP PERFORMANCE PROJECT

Kim will use her extraordinary powers of perception to place you in collegial groups for this project, and you will meet your groups on 11 January. Each group will be tasked with creating a 10-minute in-class performance that will explore ONE of the key ideas emerging from our theory readings.

Your performance will be based on one of the performance texts on the class schedule; it will take place in the first hour of Thursday's class during the week we are due to discuss that text.

Your performance should be 10 minutes long, and no longer than 12 minutes (Kim will cut you off!) Each member of the group should play a major role in creating and presenting the work, either on stage or behind the scenes.

After your performance ends, be prepared to participate in a class Q&A session. (You will get a break first!) During that session, your group can and should talk in more detail about the research that went into your performance's creation, and about which team member took on which jobs to ensure its success. Your performance work will be assessed in part on the strength of your discussion of your work in the Q&A.

Baffled? Don't be. Here are some tips to help you along.

- **Your group should select one scene or moment from your performance text, and respond to it in a creative, embodied way.** In other words, you aren't aiming to put on a "faithful" rendition of the scene or moment – you are aiming to use it to explore a critical, theoretical position (see immediately below);
- **Your presentation should focus on an exploration of a key idea that will have begun to emerge from our theoretical readings.** Examples of these may include "tragedy," "representation," "comedy," "education," "delight," "the role of the audience," and so on, though we will quickly amass many more;
- **You can, if you wish, write an original script!** Or, you may choose to adapt a scene or moment from the performance text in question. Or, you may decide to try the moment several different ways, in quick succession, using props, gestures, or other practical techniques to shift focus and tone. Be as creative as you wish – these are only three options!

3. WRITTEN PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

This is a bit like the study guide contribution, but longer and more sustained. Select a theoretical text we've discussed together; then, select a play or performance that interests you, either from among the ones we will look at together, or from elsewhere. Identify a key idea in your theory reading, and apply that idea to an analysis of your chosen performance text. **Please do not write on your group performance project text.**

Creative Option: if you wish, you can write your analysis in the voice of your chosen theorist. If you do this, remember to give equal weight to both style and substance!

4. EXTENSION EXERCISE

The hardest part of exploring theory is learning to “extend” it: to identify areas where it might be critiqued, challenged, or pushed in new directions. A terrific example of how this works is Elin Diamond’s essay on Brecht, which we will look at after reading week; she identifies aspects of his theory that can be redeployed for post-modern feminist practice, and runs with it. That’s an ace extension.

For this exercise, you’ll select one of our shared theoretical readings and poke at it a bit. Consider questions like: Where are this theorist’s potential blind spots? What do they tell us about this theorist’s world – their social or political interests? Why does this matter (so what)? How might we redeploy this theorist’s ideas in order to understand something from our immediate moment a bit more clearly?

Note: you don’t need to answer ALL of these questions, nor do you need to engage with these questions specifically. However, your extension should begin from a research question similar to these. If you’re not sure where to begin, why not ask Kim for help?

5. PARTICIPATION

You earn your 10% participation mark by coming to class, on time and prepared, each day, and by being willing to participate in class activities. The important thing is to be there and prepared: Kim doesn’t care how often you talk in class, if you’re not speaking from a place of preparedness for class. (If you haven’t read the material, trust me, Kim will know.) Participation is much, much more than just raising your hand a lot, and if you are a quiet learner there will be many ways for you to contribute.

NOTE: If you miss more than THREE classes without accommodation, you will forfeit your 10% participation mark. You don’t want to do that!

Submission rules for assignments handed in on OWL

- **Late submissions are penalized at 2% per day.** For written assignments due on a Friday, take the weekend (up to Monday at 8am) for a flat “fee” of 3%. Sometimes it’s worth it, and that’s ok; no need to clear this with Kim. Your call.
- **Submissions more than seven (7) days late** will be accepted up to the final day of the semester, but will be eligible for a grade of no more than 50%.
- **Kim cannot grant you an extension without penalty.** If you have a medical or compassionate reason for requiring accommodation, please see your home faculty’s academic counselors as soon as possible, and bring them documentation pertaining to your case. They will contact Kim to request accommodation on your behalf.
- **All written or performance material you pass in must be your own work, with all references clearly documented.** Plagiarism, defined as “The act or an instance of copying or stealing another’s words or ideas and attributing them as one’s own,” is a serious academic offense, and may be punishable with sanctions up to and including expulsion from the university. If you’re unsure whether or not you are citing your sources correctly, just ask Kim.

7. Week by week schedule

Unless otherwise noted, theoretical readings come from *Theatre/Theory/Theatre*. Please both read the text and watch the performance, when noted, for Tuesday's class.

Week 1 | 9 + 11 January

The lay of the land. Names + faces. The syllabus; some performance! Groups and Study Guide Contribution assignments on the Thursday.

Week 2 | 16 + 18 January

READ: Aristotle, *Poetics*

Week 3 | 23 + 25 January

READ: Sidney, *The Defense of Poesy*

WATCH: *As You Like It* at Shakespeare's Globe, via Course Reserves on OWL

Week 4 | 30 January + 1 February

READ: Corneille, "Of the Three Unities"

Performance Group #1, working with As You Like It

Week 5 | 6 + 8 February

READ: Diderot, both selections

WATCH: *A Doll's House*, dir. Carrie Cracknell, via Course Reserves on OWL

Week 6 | 13 + 15 February

READ: Schiller, *The Stage as a Moral Institution*

Performance Group #2, working with A Doll's House

WEEK SEVEN IS READING WEEK! ENJOY!*

*But consider reading ahead. Week 8 is the only week when we will read two theorists. Both are important, and they are in dialogue with one another.

Week 8 | 27 February + 1 March

READ: Stanislavsky, "Belief and the Sense of Truth" (via Course Reserves on OWL);

Brecht, both selections

Week 9 | 6 + 8 March

READ: Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory" (via Course Reserves on OWL)

WATCH: *The Shipment*, dir. Young Jean Lee (via Course Reserves on OWL)

[Content warning: this piece deals graphically with legacies of slavery in the U.S.]

Week 10 | 13 + 15 March

READ: Ridout, from *Stage Fright* (via Course Reserves on OWL)

Performance Group #3, working with The Shipment

Week 11 | 20 + 22 March

Workshop week!

Your extension papers are due next Friday; you're tired and you've got no idea what to write about. No fear! We will work this week on understanding the task, examining models, beginning the thinking/writing process, and getting a grip. Week 11 is the perfect time to regroup.

Week 12 | 27 + 29 March

READ: Ahmed, from *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (via Course Reserves on OWL)

WATCH: please ensure you have seen *A Thousand Splendid Suns* at the Grand for this week! (Booking information, including student discount code, on OWL)

Week 13 | 3 + 5 April

READ: Harvie, from *Fair Play* (via Course Reserves on OWL)

Week 14 | 10 April

We will draft the final exam together! There will be cake.

Thanks for being part of TS3205!