**THET 711: Critical Methods**  
**SAMPLE SYLLABUS**  
(Expect Modifications)

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PAC: Mondays, 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. and by appt.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

As scholars in the fields of theatre and performance studies, theory provides us with innumerable ways to illuminate our readings of both text and embodied performance. The primary goal of this seminar is to introduce doctoral students to a number of postmodern and contemporary theorists with a particular emphasis on how their approaches can be applied to the study of theatre. While our goal is to become acquainted with a broad spectrum of critical methods, this is not a comprehensive survey course and we will not be delving deeply into any one theory or method. There are number of important movements and schools of thought that, due to the complexity of theory—and the limits time—will not be covered. The goal, however, is that the material that is covered will make you more comfortable with reading and applying theory so that you will be more inclined to pursue these areas further and/or investigate other theoretical methods on your own. To that end, I have listed some suggested texts at the end of this syllabus.

In addition to familiarizing students with some basic theoretical approaches and arguments, this course is designed to encourage students to “think through” and apply theoretical methods to theatre and performance. In so doing, we will constantly question and discuss (in the words of Alice Rayner) “the practical side of theory” as well as “the theoretical side of practice.” Through the explication and application of the assigned readings, this course will help students understand how theory can be used to analyze or interpret performance-oriented texts and, hopefully, help them identify methods that may be particularly useful to their own research interests and projects.

**Academic Integrity and the Honor Code**

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit [http://www.studenthonor council.umd.edu/whatis.html](http://www.studenthonor council.umd.edu/whatis.html).

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

1. To familiarize students with some of the major theories that inform theatre and performance studies scholarship  
2. To encourage students to pursue independent research in the area of critical theory  
3. To learn, through practice, how to use theory in the analysis of theatre and performance
4. To help students identify methods and tools of analysis that will support their doctoral studies and research projects
5. To develop a thorough and useful prospectus

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Primary texts: Our “primary texts” will be selections from the actual theorists (rather than texts that “translate” their theories). Most of the primary text material is in the form of book chapters. You are encouraged to purchase the books that these chapters come from, but I have made master copies of these readings. They will be available in the mail-room for you to copy, but please note, you must make copies in the PAL library or outside the department (you cannot make copies using the department copier). If you would like to keep the expense of copying at a minimum, you will find the following books on reserve in the PAL library:

Supporting Articles: Our weekly readings will also be comprised of “supporting articles.” The supporting articles are not “suggested” or optional—they are required reading. These articles will not always relate directly to the primary texts, but they will demonstrate how a particular school of thought has been utilized in theatre and performance studies scholarship. Most of these works will be available electronically (the exceptions will be noted).

Students are expected to obtain the following texts on their own (many of these are also on reserve in the PAL library):

Critical Theory and Performance, Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach
The Bakhtin Reader, Mikhail Bakhtin
The Feminist Spectator as Critic, Jill Dolan
Queer Theory, Annmarie Jagose
Reader Response Criticism, Jane Tompkins, ed.

Recommended:
Semiotics and Structuralism, Terence Hawkes
Deconstruction: Theory and Practice, Christopher Norris
Marxism and Literary Theory, Terry Eagleton

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Attendance and Participation (20%)
- Theory Journal (25%)
- Critical Method Papers (20%)
- Theorist/Theory Oral Presentation (10%)
- Prospectus (25%)

Attendance and Participation
As a graduate seminar, this course is designed to inspire and facilitate discussion among colleagues. Like most graduate seminars, this class only meets once a week, thus, it is particularly important that students be present for every class.

Theory Journal
For each class, you will create an entry for your “Theory Journal.” These entries should address the ideas presented by the theorists that week. More than just writing down a series of question
or observations about the week’s readings, the goal of these entries is to learn how to articulate what you understand and unpack aspects of the readings that you don’t understand. In other words, this exercise is designed to help you teach yourself how to read (and use) theory. In each entry, you should cite the “main idea(s)” of the theorist in question, but do so using your own words (try to resist merely quoting the material). When you stumble upon ideas that are less cogent and clear, ask questions and/or use your entry to “think through” the segments. Within each entry, you should also propose ways in which the theories presented may be of use to you or your peers (and be sure to mention the latter during class discussion!). The point of the journal is to help you unpack the material we read—you should be open and willing to experiment and take risks. To that end, your journal will not be graded in terms of “right” and “wrong” answers, but it will be evaluated in terms of the depth and effort of your reflections. These journal entries will help foster class discussion and will serve as a reference source for you throughout (and, hopefully, beyond) the course. Your entries should not exceed more than two-pages in length. They will be collected after class each week, and returned to you (for inclusion in your journal notebook) at the beginning of the next class period.

**Critical Method Papers**

Two papers, approximately 5-7 pages each

For each paper, you will apply a theory or method of analysis to an object (a text, performance, or event). We will choose the objects collectively. Two class periods will be used to discuss the papers (you must send the papers via email to everyone in the class—including me—on the Thursday before the class discussion of the papers). Each student must be prepared to offer two insightful observations/questions about each paper they receive from their classmates. The first paper is due on **Thursday, October 12th** and the second paper is due on **Thursday, November 16th**.

**Theory/Theorist Presentations**

Each student will give an oral report on a theorist and at least one of his/her significant pieces of work. Presentation proposals are due on **Monday, November 13th**. **Possible subjects for presentation:**

Viktor Shklovsky or Roman Jakobson (Russian Formalism), Cleanth Brooks or W.K. Wimsatt (New Criticism), Patrice Pavis (Theatre Semiotics), Pierre Bourdieu (Cultural Production), Antonio Gramsci (Marxism)…..

Reports should contain:

1. Subject’s theoretical contextualization
2. Identify and describe the principles of theorist’s method(s) as you understand them
3. Suggest how those principles might be usefully be applied to an object (how can they help you to understand/analyze/interpret/explicate an object?) and/or pose provocative questions about the method and its application (as stimulus for class discussion)
4. Provide a bibliography that will accompany the report. The bibliography should provide a list of books and articles about theorist and his/her work.

Not only should your presentation be clear and concise in its oral delivery, but you must pass out copies of your bibliography to the entire class at the end of each presentation.

**Prospectus**

Utilizing critical theories introduced in class, your prospectus should reflect a thesis or dissertation you might write (the prospectus format will follow the instructions provided in 700).
## COURSE SCHEDULE

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Suggested Reading</th>
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<td>Sept. 4</td>
<td>Suggested Reading: “Introduction,” Theatre/Theory, Mark Fortier (Holiday)</td>
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Supporting Articles:
Bruce A. McConachie, “Historicizing the Relations of Theatrical Production” in Critical Theory and Performance (168-178)

Oct. 2
Postmodern Criticism
Primary Texts:
Jean Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulcra,” Simulcra and Simulations (1-42)
Frederic Jameson, “Postmodernism, Or, the logic of late capitalism” (1-54)

Recommended Reading: Mark Fortier, Section Three: “World and Theatre,” Theory/Theory (173-192)

Supporting Articles:
Philip Auslander, “Comedy about the Failure of Comedy: Stand-up Comedy and Postmodernism,” Critical Theory and Performance (196-207)

Oct. 9
“Historical Discourses”
Primary Texts:
Mikhail Bakhtin, “Social Heteroglossia” and “Speech Genres” (73-87), and Section Four: “The Carnival Ambivalence,” (194-244) from The Bakhtin Reader
Michel Foucault, “Las Meninas,” from The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, excerpt from The Critical Tradition (1222-1231)

Supporting Articles:
Ben Chappell, “Bakhtin’s Barbershop: Film as Folklorist,” Western Folklore, 64.3/4, Summer/Fall 2005 (209-229)

Oct. 16
Discuss “Application of Theory Papers” (Paper must be sent by email to the class no later than Thursday, Oct. 12th)

Oct. 23
Reader Response Criticism
Primary Texts:
Chapters in Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism: Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach” (50-69)
Stanley E. Fish, “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics” (70-100)
Normand N. Holland, “Unity Identity Text Self” (118-33)

Recommended Reading: Mark Fortier, Section Two: “Subjectivity and Theatre,” Theory/Theory (132-150)
Oct. 30  
**Psychoanalytical Criticism**  
**Primary Text:**  
Sigmund Freud, Excerpts from “The Interpretation of Dreams,” and “On Dreams” from *The Freud Reader*, Peter Gray, ed. (129-171)  
Sigmund Freud, “The Horror of Incest” (2-23) from *Totem and Taboo*  

Recommended Reading:  
Mark Fortier, Section Two: “Subjectivity and Theatre,” *Theory/Theory* (82-107)  

Supporting Articles:  
Diana Taylor, “’You Are Here’: The DNA of Performance,” *TDR*, 46.1, Spring 2002 (149-169)  

Nov. 6  
**Feminist/Gender Theories**  
**Primary Texts:**  
Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Chapters 1-3 & 5, pp. 1-58, 84-97)  
Judith Butler, “Preface 1999,” “Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire (3-44), *Gender Trouble*”  

Recommended Reading:  
Mark Fortier, Section Two: “Subjectivity and Theatre,” *Theory/Theory* (107-122)  

Supporting Articles:  

Nov. 13  
**Post-Colonial Theory**  
**Primary Texts:**  
Introduction (1-20) & Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory:*  
Frantz Fanon, “On National Culture,” (36-52)  
Amilcar Cabral, “National Liberation and Culture,” (53-65)  
Homi Bhaba, “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psycho and the Colonial Condition,” (112-123)  
Edward Said, excerpt from *Orientalism*, (132-148)
Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” (85-92) from *The Location of Culture*

Recommended Reading: Mark Fortier, Section Three “World and Theatre,” *Theory/Theory* (192-216)

**Supporting Articles:**

**Presentation Proposals DUE**

**Nov. 20**
Discuss “Application of Theory Papers” (Paper must be turned sent by email to the class no later than Thursday, November 16th)

**Nov. 27**
**Critical Race Theory**
Paul Gilroy, Chapter One: “The Crisis of Race and Raciology,” *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (11-53)

**Supporting Articles**

**Dec. 4**
**Queer Theory**
Primary Texts:
Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (1-132)
Jose Munoz, “Introduction,” *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1-34)

Recommended Reading: Mark Fortier, Section Three: “Subjectivity and Theatre,” *Theory/Theory* (122-131)

**Supporting Articles**

Course Evaluations

Dec. 11 Theory/Theorist Presentations; Conclusions

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED READINGS:

Critical Theory Survey Anthologies:
Literary Theory: An Introduction, Eagleton
Modern Literary Theory, Rice & Waugh (eds.)
The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism
The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends, Richter (ed.)

Books:
Semiotics in Theatre, Elam
Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism, Birringer
Totem and Taboo, Sigmund Freud
Semiotics: The Basics, Chandler
The Political Unconscious, Prisonhouse of Language, Jameson
Towards a Sociology of Culture, Williams
Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology, Johnson & Henderson, eds.
Appropriating Blackness, Johnson
Cities of the Dead, Roach
Colonialism/Postcolonialism, Loomba