

Critical Practice Performance (2020-2021) [Semester 1]

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(Office hours: Thursdays 4-5pm, online)

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A. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Critical Practice Performance.

These courses have been designed to intensify your awareness of the critical tools central to the study of English Literature. In your Pre-Honours years, you were given a brief introduction to formal and critical discourses in the first semester, and over the rest of those two years you were provided with an overall sense of the historical development of literary forms and genres. Collectively, the Critical Practice (CP) courses build upon that training. The practical skills and range of knowledge acquired over the year will equip you with a command of the precise critical terminology necessary for Honours level study in both third and fourth years.

The four CP courses – Poetry, Performance, Prose, and Criticism – will expand your sensitivity to specific generic conventions and extend your knowledge of associated critical vocabulary. This, in turn, will hone your skills in the close reading, description, and analysis of a variety of texts. In the Performance course in particular you will be encouraged to reflect upon the meaning and effect of texts in relation to their staging, exploring a range of different aspects and styles of theatre. All these courses are taught primarily by weekly lectures, supported by synchronous online discussion boards. If you have any specific queries about the courses you may consult the Course Organiser during their office hours; additionally, you may consult full time members of staff in their office hours. While the CP courses do, of course, count for credit toward your degree in their own right, the skills acquired in them are also designed to be transferable. In particular, the critical terminology acquired should be used to inform your analysis of the texts you study in the rest of your Honours courses, including your Dissertation (where appropriate).

2. MODERATION OF ASSESSMENT

In accordance with QAA expectations, as specified in Chapter B6 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the primary purpose of moderation is to ensure that assessment criteria are being applied fairly and consistently and that there is a shared understanding of the academic standards that students are expected to achieve. Moderation also provides an opportunity to assure the quality of feedback provided to students on their assessed work, in terms of its sufficiency, clarity, helpfulness and timeliness, and to comment on aspects related to the design and implementation of the assessment that may feed into future enhancements of the assessment.

Critical Practice assessments are sample second marked. Second markers also moderate every piece of feedback produced by the first marker and the mark distribution for their batch to ensure that assessments have been marked in line with the marking scale, that the range of available marks is used appropriately, that the feedback properly explains the grade awarded, and that all problematic scripts (including fail marks, rubric infringements, etc.) have been carefully considered.

Critical Practice Course Organisers have overall responsibility for moderation of CP courses. This means second markers can refer individual problematic scripts or script runs to the relevant Course Organiser, who has oversight of overall mark distributions for the course.

Moderators at all levels have the power either to confirm or to adjust marks and feedback in consultation with the original markers before final confirmation at the Exam Board.

Only moderators can determine the existence of grounds for mark adjustment, and all decisions confirmed by the Exam Board are final.

Exam Boards and External Examiners oversee the entire marking and moderation process.

B. COURSE INFORMATION

1. RATIONALE

The course aims to encourage students to think about the processes by which a play text becomes a performance text, how meaning is generated in theatrical performance, and what sorts of critical and theoretical modes might be helpful in writing critically about performance.

2. TEACHING METHODS

Five blocks of lectures and a live discussion board online to accompany each block. The lectures collectively address the implications of thinking of plays as primarily performance texts, and seeking to understand them in a performance context. The two blocks of lectures, *What is a play?* and *What is performance?* will explore various aspects of play text, elements of performance and how meaning is generated and read in performance. Blocks 3,4, and 5, *Theatre and Societies*, *Theatre and democracy*, *The "Death" of Drama?* will develop students' knowledge of the modes and technical constituents of dramatic performance, with specific regard to a number of the key concepts, theories and practices that have shaped modern performance.

3. LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. demonstrate deepened knowledge of how a play text becomes a performance text
2. demonstrate knowledge of key concepts, theories and practices which have shaped modern performance.
3. assess ideas from critical and contextual sources to analyse live performance.
4. develop the capacity to present the results of research undertaken individually and to critically evaluate accounts of performance theory produced by others.
5. demonstrate the ability to reflect constructively on the importance of such material for an understanding of the chief themes of the course.

4. HOW THE COURSE WILL WORK

There are **three** components:

- **Online teaching:** video lectures, readings/ online performances, and possibly an exercise for you to think about and apply concepts from the lecture. These will be be organised into 5 blocks (see below) and will be released on the **Tuesday of weeks 1,2,4,6,8 & 10 on Learn.**
- **Online discussion board** in which you can ask the lecturer presenting that week questions that relate to the block they are presenting. These will happen in **weeks 3,5,7,9,& 11**

- **Independent study:** this course, like all Critical Practice courses, is a lecture course. There are no seminars. This means you need to **organise** your own independent study, do your own **further reading and research beyond the reading list** for the course reading list and block readings given in online teaching.

5. LECTURES SCHEDULE (ONLINE VIA LEARN)

This will be organised in five blocks:

1. **Introduction to the course** (Ms Nicola McCartney) week 1
2. **What is a play?** (Ms Nicola McCartney) weeks 2 & 3 * see reading list for specific reading
3. **What is performance?** (Ms Nicola McCartney) weeks 4& 5 * see reading list for specific reading
4. **Theatre and Societies** (Dr Sarah Carpenter) weeks 6 & 7
5. **Theatre and Democracy** (Dr David Overend) weeks 8 & 9
6. **The “Death” of Drama?** (Prof James Loxley) weeks 10 & 11

All materials will be released on the **Tuesday of weeks 1,2,4,6,8 & 10 on Learn.**

You will have a chance to ask questions via **the online discussion boards** in **weeks 3,5,7,9,& 11 Thursdays at 12 noon and last one hour. On Learn.**

Here is a breakdown by date:

Week	Content	Lecturer	Date
1	Welcome / Intro video and general materials	NMcC	22/09
2	What is a Play?	NMcC	29/09
3	What is a Play? Q&A	NMcC	08/10
4	What is Performance? Video on class assessment	NMcC	13/10 13/10
5	Performance Q&A plus Mid term assessment Q & A (extra hour)	NMcC	22/10 22/10
6	Theatre and Societies	SC	27/10
7	Mid-term assessment due Societies Q&A	SC	2/11 5/11
8	Theatre & Democracy	DO	10/11
9	Democracy Q&A	DO	19/11
10	The “Death” of Drama? Video on class assessment Exam assessment Q & A	JL NMcC NMcC	24/11 24/11 26/11
11	Death of Drama? Q&A	JL	03/12

7. READING LIST/ SET TEXTS

- For Blocks 1 & 2 and for the mid-term COURSE ASSESSMENT essay, you should read the following as well as any materials on Learn for those blocks:

Primary:

Leach, R. *Theatre Studies: The Basics*, Routledge (May 2008) – **read chapters 1, 2,3 and 4**

Aston, Elaine & Savona George. *Theatre as Sign-System: a Semiotics of Text and Performance*, Routledge, (Nov 1991) – **this is the key text book for the class assessment**

Secondary:

Martin Esslin, *The Field of Drama: How the Signs of Drama Create Meaning on Stage and Screen* (London: Methuen, 1987)

Counsell, C. & Wolfe, L *Performance Analysis: An Introductory Coursebook*. Routledge; 1 edition (15 Mar 2001)

Leacroft, Richard & Leacroft, Helen. *Theatre and Playhouse: An Illustrated Survey of Theatre Building from Ancient Greece to the Present Day*, Methuen Publishing Ltd; Reprint edition (8 Nov 1984)

Elam, Keir. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, Routledge (June 2002)

Carlson, Marvin. *Places of Performance: Semiotics of Theatre Architecture*, Cornell University Press; (Jan 1993)

Fortier, M. Routledge *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction*, (May 2002)

Allain, P. & Harvie, J. *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance*,. Routledge (Nov 2005)

Schechner, R. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Routledge (April 2006)

Bial, H. ed. *The Performance Studies Reader*, Routledge (April 2007)

Carlson, Marvin . *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (second edition), Routledge (Oct 2003)

White, Gareth, *Audience participation in theatre aesthetics of the invitation*, Palgrave Macmillan ;2013

Bennett, Susan, *Theatre audiences : a theory of production and reception*, London : Routledge ;1997

Freshwater, Helen, *Theatre & Audience*, Palgrave Macmillan, (2009)

Strong, Judith. *Theatre Buildings: A design guide*, Routledge (2010)

- For blocks 3 to 5 there are no set texts. However, **lecturers will post on Learn the reading for that block** in the folder pertaining to that lecture.

POSSIBLE FURTHER READING

In studying performance styles and theatre history, students may find it helpful to consult the following general studies:

Glynne Wickham, *A History of the Theatre* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1992)

John Russell Brown, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre* (Oxford: OUP, 1995)

Simon Shepherd and Peter Womack, *English Drama: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996)

In studying theories around performance, genre etc, students may find it helpful to consult the following general studies:

Barker, Howard, *Arguments for a Theatre*, Manchester: Manchester University Press,1997

Beadle, Richard and Fletcher, Alan J., eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, 2nd edition, Cambridge University Press, 2008

Bial, Henry, ed., *The Performance Studies Reader*, London: Routledge, 2004

Brook, Peter, *The Empty Space*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990

Campbell, Patrick, ed., *Analysing Performance: Issues and Interpretations*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996

Carlson, Marvin, *Performance: a Critical Introduction*, London: Routledge, 1996

Delgado, Maria and Cardidad Svich, eds., *Theatre in Crisis? Performance Manifestoes for a New Century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002

Fortier, Mark, *Theory / Theatre: an Introduction*, London: Routledge, 2002

Harris, Geraldine, *Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999

Huxley, Michael, and Noel Witts, *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader* (London; Routledge, 1996)

Krasner, David, ed., *Theatre in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008)

Loxley, James, *Performativity*, London: Routledge, 2007

Roose-Evans, James, *Experimental Theatre from Stanislavski to Peter Brook*, London: Routledge, 1989

Schechner, Richard, *Performance Studies: an Introduction*, London: Routledge, 2002

Shepherd, Simon, *Drama / Theatre / Performance*, London: Routledge, 2004

Critical Practice Handbook Page 19

Styan, John L., *Drama, Stage and Audience*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975

Taxidou, Olga, *Modernism and Performance: Jarry to Brecht*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007

Weimann, Robert, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theatre*, ed. Robert Shwartz, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978

Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

8. ASSESSMENT

There are two assessments. The questions for each are as follows:

1. Coursework assessment (40%) - 1000 words

Submission date: **Mon 2 November 2020**

2. Final assessment (60%) - 1500 words

Submission date: **Wed 9 December 2020**

The Course Leader will post a short video explaining the main aspects of each task, and host an extra discussion board for each assignment in the following weeks:

Assignment 1 – week 4 – video posted Tuesday and discussion board on Learn Thurs 13:00

Assignment 2 – week 10 – video posted Tuesday and discussion board on Learn Thurs 12 noon

COURSE AND FINAL ASSESSMENT ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Coursework assessment – 1,000 words

Question: choosing a “snapshot” moment from an online performance listed below, discuss in detail the inter-relationship of any TWO or maximum of THREE of the following signifying elements in your

chosen performance, analyzing the ways in which they contributed to the development of the overall meaning(s)/ impact of the production:

Stage set; props; lighting; costume and make-up; music and sound effects; arrangement of actors in the stage space; the actor (gesture, vocal choices etc); dramaturgical choices.

You should relate your analysis of meaning(s) encoded within this snapshot to your understanding of the performance's overall meaning(s)/ impact. To what extent are the signs used to complement and stabilize each other, or to contradict and destabilize each other?

Online performances from which you must choose to write for this assignment (you must choose from this list):

- ***Othello***, RSC Online, 2015 starring Hugh Quarshie, (accessed via University Library Drama Online account, in The RSC Collection)
https://www-dramaonlinelibrary-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/video?docid=do-9781350997172&tocid=do-9781350997172_5652695666001
- ***Romeo and Juliet***, Shakespeare's Globe, 2019 version (commences on Youtube, 28 September)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFBWXRqa7Gs>
- ***The Tempest***, Donmar Warehouse, 2016, (accessed via University Library Drama Online account, in Digital Theatre Plus Collection)
<https://www.digitaltheatreplus.com/education/collections/donmar-warehouse/the-tempest>
- ***A Doll's House***, by Henrik Ibsen, Young Vic Theatre (accessed via University Library Drama Online account, in Digital Theatre Plus Collection)
<https://www.digitaltheatreplus.com/education/collections/digital-theatre/a-dolls-house>
- ***The Crucible***, by Arthur Miller, Old Vic Theatre, London (accessed via University Library Drama Online account, in The National Theatre Collection)
<https://www.digitaltheatreplus.com/education/collections/digital-theatre/the-crucible>
- ***Frankenstein***, (Benedict Cumberbatch as Creature version) directed by Danny Boyle (accessed via University Library Drama Online account, in The National Theatre Collection)
https://search-alexanderstreet-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C4167062
- ***Bound***, by Jesse Briton, Southwark Playhouse (streaming on Southwark Playhouse website)
<https://southwarkplayhouse.co.uk/archive2011/bound/>
- ***Beautiful Thing***, by Jonathan Harvey, Arts Theatre, Leicester Square (accessed via University Library Drama Online account, in Digital Theatre Plus Collection)
<https://www.digitaltheatreplus.com/education/collections/digital-theatre/beautiful-thing>
- ***Buried Child***, by Sam Shepard, (accessed via University Library Drama Online account, in Digital Theatre Plus Collection)
<https://www.digitaltheatreplus.com/education/collections/broadway-hd/buried-child>
- ***The Container***, by Clare Bayley, Young Vic, London (accessed via University Library Drama Online account, in Digital Theatre Plus Collection)
<https://www.digitaltheatreplus.com/education/collections/digital-theatre/the-container>
- ***Indecent***, by Rebecca Taichman/Paula Vogel, (accessed via University Library Drama Online account, in Digital Theatre Plus Collection)
<https://www.digitaltheatreplus.com/education/collections/broadway-hd/indecnt>
- ***A Disappearing Number***, by Simon McBurney, Theatre de Complicite 2008 (accessed via University Library Drama Online account, in Digital Theatre Plus Collection)
<https://www.digitaltheatreplus.com/education/collections/complicite/a-disappearing-number>

- **Things I Know to Be True**, by Andrew Bovell, Frantic Assembly (accessed via University Library Drama Online account, in Digital Theatre Plus Collection)
<https://www.digitaltheatreplus.com/education/collections/digital-theatre/things-i-know-to-be-true>
- **Pipeline**, by Dominique Morriseau, Lincoln Center, 2019 (accessed via University Library Drama Online account, in Digital Theatre Plus Collection)
<https://www.digitaltheatreplus.com/education/collections/broadway-hd/pipeline>

Questions and pointers to help you frame this assignment:

1. You must choose a performance from the above list.
2. Watch the whole performance to decide what you think the performance's overall meaning(s)/ impact are.
3. Select a snapshot moment (30 secs to one minute) of the performance to analyse closely. This is essentially a close reading exercise, but **not of** the literary text but the live (in this case recording of the live) performance.
4. Remember this **is not a literary analysis essay**. You can refer to the (pre-)text – the original play text - if this supports your argument, but **this is an analysis of the signs and systems of performance**, not of the play text itself.
5. Choose **two or a maximum of three** sign systems which do absolutely inter-relate to generate meaning. Remember you are being asked to analyse **how sign systems work together**, not how they work individually.
6. Use the **four levels of meaning in a sign** (Aston and Savona) as a tool to analyse and argue how signs are working to generate meaning.
7. Think about **why you read a particular sign/ element of theatre to have certain meaning(s)**. What are **the social and cultural codes** which inform your understanding?
8. Remember that you are **not giving a subjective opinion**. This is an academic essay and therefore you have to **make an argument about why you read the meaning(s) encoded in the snapshot of the performance text**, where possible, supporting your argument with appropriate referencing to academic sources, art works, films, tv programmes etc.

2. Final assessment

Question:

Write EITHER a directing OR a design proposal for an imagined performance of your chosen scene or extract from the list below. (You can choose a scene from a theatre text not on this list, but this must be agreed with the course organiser.)

You should focus particularly on how theatrical sign systems (set, lights, sound, costume, make-up, arrangement of actors within the stage space, the choice of stage space itself, the vocal and physical choices of the actor etc) could work to **shape the audience's experience and understanding of the extract or scene**. You will **not be assessed on the originality** of your staging, but on the ways in which you explore what is at stake in the decisions that you make.

Note that 1500 words does not allow much scope for broad analysis, and **concentration on two or more extra-textual aspects of performance which work together**, or at any rate a very limited number, may help concision.

Further Advice

Below is a brief checklist of some of the key questions you might want to consider. Please note that, while it is important you think about them in planning your response, you are not required to

address every one of these points within the 1500 words; they are merely guidelines to illustrate the issues and questions that can effectively be addressed.

1. Opening questions

Read the whole play first. What is the scene about? And what is the scene about within the context of the whole play? What do I want to communicate in performance? These are the key questions that will orientate the decisions made about your design or directing proposal. In many ways, they are literary-critical questions: what one is interested in at this point is interpretation of the text.

2. Processes of staging

Once you have decided what the scene is (or should be) doing or conveying, it becomes important to explore the means by which these ideas or effects can be communicated. The key questions here are to do with how the particular media available in performance can be deployed. Are there any stage directions in the (pre-)text? Will you accept, reject or adapt these?

3. Do you have a production concept, a big over-arching idea inspired by the (pre-)text that you wish to convey through your design or staging of the scene? Try to State concept in one sentence if you can. Explain how you arrived at this concept. How would this unifying vision apply to the direction of the actors or the design? Do you have a visual metaphor?

4. What are your casting requirements: Male/female. Chorus. Doubling? Gender neutral? Ages? Will you stick with those encoded within the (pre-)text or adapt?

5. Setting: what is your choice of time period of the play, location (country, city, etc.), immediate surroundings (e.g. set) Are you accepting, rejecting or adapting that which is encoded within the (pre-)text? Why?

6. What are your technical/ design requirements (scenic, costume, lighting, sound, props)? Why?

7. Are there any production issues or special effects such as pyrotechnics, flying, fog; costume heavy; props nightmare?

8. What is the nature of the stage space? Why have you chosen this? What effect will it have on your directorial or design decisions?

9. Is it necessary for you to adapt, edit or re-write the (pre-) text in any way to realize your imagined performance? Why?

10. Do include a reference list where and when necessary. Use references to support your arguments where appropriate. However, we do not expect this bibliography to be as lengthy as it would for a standard academic essay.

11. Do not write on any play on which you have already written in another essay for this or any other course.

12. If you are writing a DESIGN proposal you may need to talk about how actors interact with the design but the main focus should be on DESIGN elements. **If you choose to submit a DIRECTING proposal**, you may choose to allude to design elements, but the essay should focus on *synthesising other elements/ signs of performance* you will employ to make your imagined production concept; you do not have to cover all of them but a directing proposal will necessarily cover more elements than the narrower focus on design.

N.B.

You may also include an annotated scene as part of your directing proposal. You may choose to add visual, photographic or illustrative material to support your design OR directing proposal. If you need to re-write the (pre-)text, you may also submit a 500 word sample of your script. You will not be assessed on this material but do include it in an appendix if it helps you to support your arguments made in the essay.

Choice of texts from which you can choose a scene for the assignment:

- Euripides, *The Bacchae*
- Aristophanes, *The Frogs*
- Everyman (any edition)
- Sir Robert Lindsay, *An Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*
- William Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens; Much Ado About Nothing*
- Christopher Marlowe, *Dr Faustus*
- Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*
- Elizabeth Carey, *The Tragedy of Mariam*
- Jean Racine, *Phaedra*
- Aphra Behn, *The Rover*
- William Congreve, *The Way of the World*
- Friedrich Schiller, *The Robbers*
- Oscar Wilde, *Salome*
- Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler; The Master Builder*
- Anton Chekhov, *The Three Sisters; Uncle Vanya*
- Eugene Ionesco, *Rhinoceros*
- Bertolt Brecht, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui; Saint Joan of the Stockyards*
- Tennessee Williams, *A Street Car Named Desire*
- Eugene O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*
- Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot; Endgame*
- Harold Pinter, *Betrayal*
- Wole Soyinka, *The Trials of Brother Jero (Black Drama Online via Library)*
- Caryl Churchill, *Cloud Nine; Love and Information*
- Liz Lochhead, *Blood and Ice; Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*
- Mark Ravenhill, *Shopping and Fucking*
- Diane Samuels, *Kindertransport*
- Tanika Gupta, *The Empress; Lions and Tigers*
- Suzan Lori-Parks, *Topdog/Underdog*
- debbie tucker green, *Random*
- Alecky Blythe, *London Road*
- Kaite O'Reilly, *In Water I'm Weightless*

No publication details are given as there are many different editions of most of these plays. Multiple copies of all of these texts (some in a number of different editions/translations) are held in the library and most of these are available online.

Further reading to help you with this part of the assessment:

Directing

Mitchell, Katie. *The Director's Craft: A handbook for the theatre*, Routledge (2008) [Shevtsova](#), Shevtsova, M & Innes, C. *Directors/Directing: Conversations on Theatre*,. Cambridge University Press (2009)

Shevtsova, M & Innes, C. *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing*, Cambridge University Press (2013)

Dancyger, Ken. *The Director's Idea*, Boston (2006)

Design: light, sound, set

Collins, J & Nisbet, A. *Theatre and Performance Design: A Reader in Scenography*, Routledge (2010)

Di Benedetto, Stephen. *An Introduction to Theatre Design*. Routledge (2012)

Burnett, Kate. *Make/Believe: UK design for performance 2011-2015*, Society of British Theatre Designers, (2014)

Brown, Ross. *Sound: a reader in theatre practice*, Palgrave MacMillan (2010)

Gloman, Chuck B. & Napoli, Rob. *Scenic Design and Lighting Techniques: a basic guide for theatre*, Elsevier (2007)

Collins, Jane & Nisbet, Andrew. *Theatre and Performance Design*. Routledge (2010)

McKinney, Jocelyn & Butterworth, Philip. *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography*. Cambridge University Press, (2009)

Coleman, Peter. *Basics – A Beginner's Guide to Stage Lighting*. Entertainment Technology Press, (2003)

Coleman, Peter. *Basics – A Beginner's Guide to Stage Sound*. Entertainment Technology Press, (2004)