

T D 387 D, Unique #, Spring 2005  
Reception Theories  
TTH, 12:30-1:45, WIN 2.136  
Professor Stacy Wolf

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Office hours: Tues 2-3, Thurs 11-12 noon, and by appointment

### **Course Description:**

How can scholars of theatre and performance capture, understand, and analyze reception practices? What do audiences do with performance and how can we study those processes? How can we understand what is experienced, what is seen, heard, and felt at the theatre? What is the relationship between a performance text “itself” and various spectators’ readings of it?

This course will survey reception theories across disciplines, including literature, film, television, anthropology, and sociology, and of course theatre, with particular attention to those theories most useful to understanding reception of live, ephemeral performance events. We will read both primary theoretical texts and case studies of reception. In addition to studying reception theories, we will also “try out” and practice various methodologies to analyze reception. The question of the use value of various theories and methods will be the central focus of our project.

Questions we will consider include:

- What is the conceptual and actual difference between a spectator and an audience?
- How do we reconstruct historical audiences or a representation of historical audiences?
- How do we negotiate the tension between a postmodern skepticism of meaning and a materialist necessity to situate meaning?
- How can we observe, describe, explain, and analyze the interaction between performance and its production context, including local geographies and politics, in a complex and nuanced, politically and ethically responsible way?
- What is the value (or not?) of identity- and community-based knowledges and gossip in terms of performance reception?
- How does fan culture and how do star identities influence reception practices?
- What is the authority of cultural capital and how do hierarchies of culture structure reception practices?

### **Course Requirements**

A note on course organization: Readings are scheduled weekly, rather than daily. On Tuesday, two students will lead the class, using the reading as a basis for presentation and discussion. On Thursday, we will all build on the work of Tuesday and continue the discussion.

#### ***1. Attendance and participation and short writing assignments*** (1/3 final grade)

100% attendance and excellent, consistently engaged participation are expected. After three excused or unexcused absences, your final grade for the course will drop by a full letter (that is, a final grade of “A” becomes a “B” with four absences). Three late arrivals or early departures equal one absence.

**Short writing:**

- 1) **Short papers** to be posted to BB on:
  - a. Reader Response Theory (Eagleton and Tompkins), due Wed, Jan 19<sup>th</sup> by midnight, explained below
  - b. Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*, due Mon, Jan 24<sup>th</sup> by midnight, specifics TBA
  - c. Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, due Mon, Jan 31<sup>st</sup> by midnight, specifics TBA

2) **Four mid-week Blackboard posts to “check-in”**: Every other week (beginning the week of Feb 8), each student will post a brief comment (about 100-150 words) to Blackboard between Tuesday and Thursday’s classes, either extending the conversation, raising new questions, making observations about the material, pointing to issues that we have not discussed. Due by 5 p.m. each Wednesday.

- 4) **Writing or assignments** as designated by students

2. **One day of presentation/discussion facilitation: Orienting the Material** (1/3 final grade)

Students will work in pairs to lead one class session. The format of the class is up to you, but I would like you to think of it as “orienting the material.” The project of “orientation” will vary from week to week, depending on students’ interests and the reading itself. Some of the reading is quite theoretical and might benefit from focusing on applications and examples. On other weeks the articles are in direct conversation with one another, so it might be useful to trace the background and other work of each author to understand his/her perspective. Still other weeks’ readings reference histories of the field, which might be enhanced by presenting information about other issues that we’re not studying directly. Each team should consider the week’s readings and how best to supplement them.

In addition:

- 1) Student facilitators should design a short writing assignment for Tuesday’s class, which should be posted to Blackboard no later than the preceding Sunday at 5 p.m. If you want us to see a performance or a movie or tv show, please do let us know as early as possible (that is, it’s fine to let us know what you want us to do well before your week).
  - 2) The class session itself should be partly lecture/presentation and partly discussion/activity. You are welcome to use performance and you are encouraged to connect the theories that we study with examples, case studies, or applications, which may or may not be taken from live performance.
  - 3) You should also attempt to make connections and comparisons with the previous weeks’ theories and methods, issues and concerns.
  - 4) Please turn in a written self-evaluation of your working process and the class session on Thursday following your teaching day.
  - 5) Please do see me to discuss your ideas and plans for the class, and plan to meet with me afterwards to evaluate the class.
3. **Final project**, due in the following stages: (1/3 final grade)
- 1) **Proposal** (due February 22<sup>nd</sup>)
  - 2) **Draft** to workshop group (optional to me) (due April 12<sup>th</sup>) (Groups TBA)

- 3) ***In-class presentation*** (10 minutes, dates TBA April 26<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>)
- 4) ***Final project*** (due Friday May 6<sup>th</sup> by 12 noon)

Your final project should allow you to extend the work of the class into your own area of interest and research, both in its content and its form. You are encouraged to consider performances that are historical and/or contemporary, scripted and/or unscripted, documented and/or undocumented, across a range of audiences, as your own examples for study. The form is up to you: a conference-length paper is an excellent option, but you should also feel free to consider other forms of work—creating a website; making a performance; devising an annotated bibliography; writing a grant proposal for a project; writing a journal article (for an academic journal article, for a trade publication, or for a newspaper), to name a few. Some other ideas for final projects:

- Select one specific performance event (something in Austin; something from the New Works Festival; something else you've seen recently or have plans to see) and analyze its reception using some of the theories we study in the class, perhaps to create a "reception theory journal."
- Explore another area of reception theory that we have not explored in the class, e.g., star study, genre study, more anthropologically-based or folklore-based methods, etc.
- Read more work by one of the scholars we study and create an intellectual biography of that scholar.
- Develop a new theory or methodology or praxis for analyzing reception, culled from our readings in class
- Devise a syllabus and pedagogical plan for an undergraduate version of this course.

I'd like to see about 12 pages of writing, or approximately the equivalent amount in other forms of work.

\*\*Please note: drafts of your project are due to your group relatively late in the semester. Please feel free to meet with me at any point along the way to discuss your work.

### **Required Texts** [available at the UT Co-op]

Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*

Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

Course reader at Abel's (715D West 23<sup>rd</sup> St, 472-5353)

### **Course Schedule and Readings**

(all readings, except for January 20<sup>th</sup>, Bennett, and Carlson, are in the Course Reader)

#### **Week 1: Introduction**

Tuesday, Jan 18: Introduction to class, you, me, goals and expectations

Thursday, Jan 20: **A glance at literary-based Reader Response Theory**

Terry Eagleton, excerpt from "Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception Theory," from

*Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 74-90 [17 pp.]

Jane P. Tompkins, "An Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism," from *Reader Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980), ix-xxvi [18 pp.]

[Reading on e-reserves]

**\*\*Assignment due Wed, Jan 19<sup>th</sup> by midnight:** Please post one of the following to BB: 1) one or two questions for discussion; 2) a quotation from the reading with an accompanying question; 3) an example or application with an analysis or explanation enabled by the reading; 4) a critique; 5) an idea that connects these essays to something else you have read or studied. About 250 words.

### **Week 2, Jan 25 and 27: An Overview of Theatre Reception Studies**

Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*

**\*\*Assignment due Mon, Jan 24<sup>th</sup> by midnight**

### **Week 3, Feb 1 and 3: Memory, History, and Semiotics**

Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*

**\*\*Assignment due Mon, Jan 31<sup>st</sup> by midnight**

### **Week 4, Feb 8 and 10: Constructing Historical Theatre Audiences**

Bruce McConachie, "Introduction," "Part I: The Waning of Paternalistic Theatre for the Elite, 1820-1835," from *Melodramatic Formations: American Theater and Society, 1820-1870*, ix-xiv, 1-63 [69 pp.]

Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow, "Introduction," "Part Four: 'Theatric Tourists' and the West End" ("The West End," "A National Drama: A National Theatre and the Case of Drury Lane," "Conclusion," from *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880*, ix-xiv, 167-225, 226-230 [70 pp.]

Richard Butsch, "Introduction: Participative Public, Passive Private?" "Matinee Ladies: Re-gendering Theater Audiences," "Blackface, Whiteface," "Variety, Liquor, and Lust," "Vaudeville, Incorporated," "'Legitimate' and 'Illegitimate' Theater around the Turn of the Century" (chapters 5-9), from *The Making of American Audiences, From Stage to Television, 1750-1990*, 1-19, 66-138 [92 pp.]

[231 pp (but not difficult)]

**\*Student-led classes begin on Tuesday Feb 8<sup>th</sup>:** 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

### **Week 5, Feb 15 and 17: Film Reception Theories**

Judith Mayne, "Spectatorship Reconsidered," White Spectatorship and Genre-Mixing," from *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 53-76, 142-156 [39 pp.]

Janet Staiger, "Toward a Historical Materialist Approach to Reception Studies," from *Interpreting Films*, 79-97 [19 pp.]

Rhona Berenstein, "Spectatorship-As-Drag: Re-dressing Classic Horror Cinema," from *Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema*, 32-59 [28 pp.]

Sarah Bay-Cheng, "Following the Gaze: The Influence (and Problems) of Feminist Film Theory in Theater Criticism," from *Theater and Film: A Comparative Anthology*, 162-171 [10 pp.]

[96 pp.]

Facilitators: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 6, Feb 22 and 24: British Cultural Studies: The everyday and the question of "use"**

David Morley, "Changing Paradigms in Audience Studies," from *Remote Control: Television, Audience and Cultural Power*, 16-43 [28 pp.]

John Fiske, "Moments of Television: Neither the Text Nor the Audience," from *Remote Control*, 56-78 [23 pp.]

Janice A. Radway, "Introduction," "The Readers and Their Romances," from *Reading the Romance*, 3-18, 46-85 [56 pp.]

[108 pp.]

Facilitators: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

\*Final project proposals due February 22<sup>nd</sup>

**Week 7, March 1 and 3: Cultural Studies, Television Studies: Ethnographic methods and empirical audiences**

Janice Radway, "Reception Study: Ethnography and the Problems of Dispersed Audiences and Nomadic Subjects," from *Cultural Studies*, 359-376 [18 pp.]

Lawrence Grossberg, "Wandering Audiences, Nomadic Critics," from *Cultural Studies*, 377-391 [15 pp.]

David Sholle, "Reading the Audience, Reading Resistance: Prospects and Problems," from *Journal of Film and Video*, 80-89 [10 pp.]

Ien Ang, "Introduction: Media Audiences, Postmodernity and Cultural Contradiction," "On the Politics of Empirical Audience Research," from *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World*, 1-15, 35-52 [33 pp.]

[76 pp.]

Facilitators: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 8, March 8 and 10: Sociological Approaches**

Raymond Williams, "Structures of Feeling," "The Sociology of Culture," from *Marxism and Literature*, 128-141 [14 pp.]

Pierre Bourdieu, "Introduction," from *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, 1-15 [15 pp.]

Randal Johnson, "Editor's Introduction: Pierre Bourdieu on Art, Literature and Culture," from *The Field of Cultural Production*, 1-25 [25 pp.]

Stacy Wolf, "Civilizing and Selling Spectators: Audiences at the Madison Civic Center," from *Theatre Survey*, 7-23 [17 pp.]

Vera L. Zolberg, "Structural Support, Audiences, and the Social Uses of Art," from *Constructing a Sociology of the Arts*, 136-161 [26 pp.]

[97 pp.]

Facilitators: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

Week 9: Spring Break

**Week 10, March 22 and 24: Identity-oriented Practices I: Gender and Sexuality**

Jackie Stacey, "From the Male Gaze to the Female Spectator," "The Lost Audience: Researching Cinema History and the History of the Research," from *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, 19-48, 49-79 [61 pp.]

Alexander Doty, "There's Something Queer Here," from *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, 1-16 [16 pp.]

Tamsin Wilton, "On Not Being Lady Macbeth: Some (troubled) Thoughts on Lesbian Spectatorship," from *Immortal Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image*, 143-162 [20 pp.]

[97 pp.]

Facilitators: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 11, March 29 and 31: Identity-oriented Practices II: Race and Ethnicity**

Alberto Sandoval-Sanchez, "A Puerto Rican Reading of *West Side Story*," from *José, Can you See? Latinos On and Off Broadway*, 62-82 [21 pp.]

bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," from *Black American Cinema*, 288-302 [15 pp.]

José Esteban Muñoz, "Performing Disidentifications," from *Disidentifications: Queers of Colors and the Performance of Politics*, 1-37 [37 pp.]

[73 pp.]

Facilitators: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 12, April 5 and 7: Identity-oriented Practices III: Affect and Affiliation**

Petra Kupperts, "Practices of Reading Difference," from *Disability and Contemporary Performance: Bodies on Edge*, 12-30 [29 pp.]

Wayne Koestenbaum, "The Shut-in Fan: Opera at Home," from *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire*, 46-83 [38 pp.]

Diana Taylor, "False Identifications: Minority Populations Mourn Diana," from *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, 133-160 [28 pp.]

[95 pp.]

Facilitators: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 13, April 12 and 14: New Works Festival.**

No formal class meetings. See performances!

*\*Draft groups meet this week*

**Week 14, April 19 and 21: TBA**

Reading will depend on interests, questions, and concerns

**Week 15**

Tuesday, April 26: Presentations

Thursday, April 28: Presentations [ASCAP/Jerry Herman musical theatre symposium]

**Week 16**

Tuesday, May 3: Presentations

Thursday, May 5: Presentations, wrap-up

Friday, May 6: Final papers or projects due, 12 noon

**Grading Policy:**

What an A means: To earn an A for this class, you arrive in class a few minutes early and are ready to go. You don't miss any classes. Your daily engagement with the course material and your active participation in class discussion demonstrates excellent preparedness. Clearly, a large amount of diligence and initiative goes into all of your assignments. Your writing is thoughtful and substantive; your presentation/facilitation is well-planned and creative. Your participation in class discussions is thoughtful, succinct, and moves the conversation forward. Your short written assignments are well-conceived, well-written, proofread, and pose useful questions for yourself and the class to ponder. Your final project shows that you've gained a certain mastery of the goals we've worked toward in the course. Ultimately, an "A" means that your thinking, writing, and analytical skills show care throughout the semester and much improvement by the end, and that you've clearly expanded your knowledge and your skills.

What a B means: To earn a B for this class, you might miss a class or two or come late several times. Your work is very good and demonstrates focus and care but might not be as creative or bold or sophisticated as for an A. You participate in discussions, but not as consistently or productively as you might; you have observations to make about the reading but not every day; your work seems completed somewhat hurriedly or without complete focus and ambition. Your assignments overall don't show substantial improvement; and you have only somewhat mastered the skills we've addressed in the course.

What a C means: To earn a C for this class, you miss a few classes and/or consistently come late. You are only sometimes involved in class discussion. You sometimes don't appear to have read the discussion assignments carefully. Your work has mistakes or it exhibits the minimum effort and care. There may be some typos or writing problems. Overall, you don't appear entirely motivated to do well. Mastering the skills of the course does not seem to be a top priority for you.

An "F" grade means you have not done any of the work and are generally disengaged from the course content and process.

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On Academic Integrity: While some of the work in this class is collaborative, I assume that all work is your own. Please give appropriate credit and use proper citation form for all materials.

On disabilities: The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Student at 471-6259, 471-4641 TTY.

I encourage you to come to see me or to communicate via email with questions, ideas, suggestions, and comments.