TH253-15 Politics and Performance: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

21/22

Department
SCAPVC - Theatre and Performance Studies
Level
Undergraduate Level 2
Module leader
Julia Peetz
Credit value
15
Module duration
10 weeks
Assessment
100% coursework
Study location
University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module investigates the relationship between performance and contemporary politics, both institutional and oppositional. Introducing students to the interdisciplinary field of politics and performance research, which is a particular strength of the University of Warwick, the module aims to prepare students to engage critically and analytically from different conceptual perspectives in analysing performances in and of politics. Students will explore performances of parliaments, politicians, pressure groups, and protestors through group work, simulation games, presentations, and written analysis. Thinking through the significance and applicability of concepts like performance, performativity, theatricality, ritual, and embodiment beyond theatre settings, students will gain a deeper understanding of key concepts in Theatre and Performance Studies.

Module aims

The behaviour of politicians and the rituals and procedures of both the institutional structures of democratic politics (like governments, parliaments, and courts) and forms of political activism (from lobbying to protest demonstrations, riots, and terrorist acts) are often described as ‘theatre-like’ in that they appear to be stage-managed, performed, and directed at audiences. Does this mean that there is something ‘special’ about the relationship between politics and theatre? What

does it mean to interpret contemporary politics through the lens of performance? The module will explore different ways in which theatre/performance and politics have been linked by introducing students to interdisciplinary scholarship developed in theatre/performance studies, philosophy, and political science.

The module will consider:

(1) Performances by politicians and political institutions as well as their potential function in democratic politics. Questions include: Do politicians' performances distract from policy or do they play an important role in the political process? What is the relationship between such performances and the concept of political representation?

(2) Different forms of political activism, their aims, and strategies: ranging from political pressure groups to theatrical and avant-garde activism. Questions include: How do forms of activism proceed performatively and theatrically? How do their aims align with their strategies?

(3) The contested relationship between politics and theatre. Different perspectives on the political potential and efficacy of theatre and performance art will be examined. Questions include: If politics is theatrical, is the theatre then uniquely placed to speak back to institutional politics? What happens to forms of activism when they are represented on the theatre stage?

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

WEEK ONE: Introduction to Politics and Performance

WEEK TWO: Democratic Politics and Performance 1: Performative Representation and Politicians' Public Performances

WEEK THREE: Democratic Politics and Performance 2: Ritual and Parliamentary Politics

WEEEK FOUR: Oppositional Politics and Performance 1: Pressure Groups and Activism

WEEK FIVE: Oppositional Politics and Performance 2: Anarchism and Protest

WEEK SIX: Reading week

WEEK SEVEN: Bodies in the Public Sphere: Ideals, Critiques, and Challenges of Embodiment; first group presentation

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT DEADLINE: essay plan of 250 words, which includes self-formulated essay question, structure for the essay, and draft bibliography. The essay plan is the basis for a 1-1 discussion of the final essay with module tutor in sessions following seminars in week 8, 9, and 10.

WEEK EIGHT: Uncertainty in Political Performance: Theatricality, Political Myth, and Populism as Challenges to Political Rationality, second group presentation

WEEK NINE: Global Politics and Performance: Climate Crisis, Posthumanism, and Social Media; third group presentation

WEEK TEN: Closing plenary sessions and recap on different disciplinary perspectives to politics and performance

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Develop a complex understanding of theories of performativity and theatricality
- Engage critically with a range of global case studies of performances within institutional and oppositional politics
- Analyse diverse social and cultural practices using a broad understanding of performance through workshops, student-led presentations, and in writing
- Develop skills in understanding and critiquing interdisciplinary scholarship and different disciplinary perspectives
- Develop skills in preparation, communication, and peer feedback
- Develop skills in evaluating and critiquing different political media sources

Indicative reading list

Butler, Judith. 1997. Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative. New York: Routledge.

Coleman, Stephen. 2015. ‘Elections as Storytelling Contests.’ Contemporary Theatre Review 25 (2): 166–176.

Laclau, Ernesto. 2005. On Populist Reason. London: Verso.

Levin, Laura, and Barry Freeman, eds. 2016. ‘Performing Politicians: A CTR Wrecking Ball.’ Special issue, Canadian Theatre Review 166. https://muse.jhu.edu/issue/33522.

Moffitt, Benjamin. 2016. The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation. Stanford: Stanford UP.

Nield, Sophie, 2006. ‘There Is Another World: Space, Theatre and Global Anti-Capitalism.’ Contemporary Theatre Review 16 (1): 51–61.

Peetz, Julia (2019). 'Theatricality as an Interdisciplinary Problem.' Performance Research 24 (4): 63–67.

Pew Research Center. 2015. Beyond Distrust: How Americans View Their Government, 23 November. http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/11/11-23-2015-Governance-release.pdf.

Rai, Shirin M., and Janelle Reinelt, eds. 2015. The Grammar of Politics and Performance. Abingdon: Routledge.

Rancière, Jacques. 2010. ‘Ten Theses on Politics.’ In Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics, edited and translated by Steven Corcoran, 27–44. London: Continuum.

Saward, Michael. 2010. The Representative Claim. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Tomlin, Liz. 2016. ‘“Constellations of Singularities”: The Rejection of Representative Democracy in

Coney’s Early Days (of a Better Nation).’ Studies in Theatre and Performance 36 (1): 27–34.

Research element

Students will formulate their own essay question for the final assessment and respond to the question in an essay using a chosen theoretical approach and case studies (this approach will be developed in a 1-1 consultation with the module tutor). This includes finding additional literature and news sources on their chosen topic that go beyond the required and suggested readings for the class.

Interdisciplinary

The module engages with social science (especially political studies and sociology), political philosophy, and theatre and performance studies perspectives, aiming to explore the strengths and weaknesses of each, as well as the necessity and challenges of interdisciplinary research/study.

International

The module considers politics and performance within a variety of different national and global contexts.

Subject specific skills

Demonstrate an awareness of the key theories and concepts in Theatre and Performances Studies, including awareness of their significance beyond theatre settings.
Develop capacity to analyse a wide range of case studies through the lens of performance.
Develop an understanding of Theatre and Performance Studies within a broader view of different academic disciplines.

Transferable skills

Verbal and written analysis and critique of contemporary politics and news sources; media literacy.
Demonstration of effective time management and personal organisation in order to research, prepare and present materials.
Ability to communicate effectively in public settings.
Self-reflexivity and peer feedback.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	9 sessions of 2 hours (12%)
Total	150 hours

Type	Required
Project supervision	1 session of 1 hour (1%)
Other activity	3 hours (2%)
Private study	91 hours (61%)
Assessment	37 hours (25%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

Reading and other preparation (e.g., watching assigned videos) for each seminar; Independent research for assessments.

Other activity description

Preparation of formative assessment: essay plan to be discussed in 1-1 discussion with module tutor.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A1

	Weighting	Study time
Group presentation	30%	10 hours
In class group presentation that explicates a piece of relevant scholarship, applies it to chosen case study, and poses discussion questions.		
Final Essay	70%	27 hours
Final essay posing and responding to a relevant question on the intersection of politics and performance.		

Feedback on assessment

Written and oral

Availability

Courses

This module is Core for:

- Year 2 of UTHA-W422 Undergraduate Theatre and Performance Studies (with Intercalated Year)

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of UTHA-QW34 Undergraduate English and Theatre Studies
- UTHA-W421 Undergraduate Theatre and Performance Studies
    - Year 2 of W421 Theatre and Performance Studies
    - Year 2 of W421 Theatre and Performance Studies