**Course title:** HONR 287H “The City as Theater: Examining the Roles of Theater and Philosophy in Public Life”

**Instructors:**

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**Course description:**

The premise of this course is that we need both theater and philosophy if we are to have a robust understanding of how to act as citizens. This claim, however, runs counter to the history of Western thought. Since Ancient Athens, theater and philosophy often have been treated as competing rather than complementary influences and authorities on cities and citizenship. The “old quarrel” that set the two in competition with one another was the result of one side seeing distortions in the other that each feared would have negative effects on cities and citizens—on the one hand, theater can devolve into mere spectacle; on the other hand, philosophy can devolve into empty rhetoric. In those cases, we lose the ability to engage in critical reflection—and yet that is the key to citizenship. But critical reflection is best developed by engaging both our imaginations and our reason, and that requires that we set aside the “old quarrel” and embrace both theater and philosophy as important sources that shape our understanding of citizenship and our actions as citizens. In this course, we engage that quarrel through the study of philosophical and theatrical interventions in the city, analyzing examples that that shape how we experience and think about cities and citizenship.

Assigned readings will help illuminate the old quarrel and various ways in which it is tested and/or invoked during key periods of history. Students will see the ways in which both philosophy and theater have been employed in the service of varied political ends. At the same time, it is important that students understand that neither philosophy nor theater functions in purely instrumental ways. We will explore five models of theatrical interventions in the city: a) civic theater; b) utopian or imaginary; c) adaptation; d) interview, interpretation, and reenactment of urban events; e) agit prop. In addition, we will consider two major critical/interpretative approaches to theater: 1) critical materialism and 2) performance theory.

The class will feature a theater workshop (during regular class meetings) with theater artist Aaron Landsman, whose participatory theater project *The City Council Meeting* is currently playing in New York. The course does not assume prior theater background, but will require that students engage both their creative and intellectual sides to develop new experiences and reflections of cities and citizenship. The course also encourages students to learn more about Scranton and their home communities, as well as to explore a wide range of theater and performances.

**Course Objectives:** Students who do the work and complete the course successfully will:

1. Understand the roles of both theater and philosophy in the formation of public life and citizenship
2. Reflect on the normative ideals of cities and citizenship as well as their own political engagement
3. Reflect on the role of the arts in cities and city life
4. Explore their creative capacity in developing and performing a theater piece
5. Have a renewed sense of their surroundings, both the urban context in which they study and local arts resources

**GE Requirements:** This course fulfills a W (writing-intensive) requirement for all enrolled students. Students also may choose to use this course to fulfill a P (Philosophy/Theology ) OR a CA (Art, Music, Theater) GE requirement.

**Texts:**

**Required for purchase:**

1) Meagher, *Philosophy and the City*

2) Aristophanes *Acharnians, Lysistrata, Clouds*

3) Fugard, *Statements* (contains *The Island*)

4) Woodruff, ed. and trans., *Sophocles' Antigone*

5) Eno, *Middletown*

6) Wilder, *Our Town*

7) Harvie, *The City and Theater*

**Required but no need to purchase:**

1. Aristotle, *The Poetics*, selections (on reserve via Angel)
2. Luzika, Naomi. *The Vanishing Point* (on reserve via Angel)
3. *The Laramie Project* (video)
4. *Twilight Los Angeles* (video)

**Assignments:**

1. **Class participation: 10%.** This course is organized as a seminar, which means that students are expected to actively contribute to both the teaching and the learning that takes place in this course. Class participation includes attendance and an indication that one has read and thought about the assigned texts. *Asking* good questions, as well as answering questions and making comments are all valuable class contributions. While there are more specific assignments below that should motivate your class participation, 10% of your grade is reserved for your attendance and participation in general discussions, in-class exercises, and possible short homework assignments. While it is always better for students to attend some of a class than none at all, students should make every effort to arrive on-time and plan other needs so that they will not have to leave class early or leave and return during class. Students who engage in such behaviors more than an isolated time or two will lose participation points.

**Attendance policy:** students are responsible for all material covered in class, whether in attendance or not. Your physical presence in the classroom is insufficient to count as having attended class; you also must be involved in the class. Students who text message, surf the web, read unrelated materials, or engage in disruptive behavior will be marked as absent. We will not assist a student with an unexcused absence in making up class material. An unexcused absence is any absence other than documented illness or death in the immediate family. *Students should* ***not*** *contact us for an isolated absence with some excuse; we assume that you had a good reason to miss or you would not have done so.* Students who miss an isolated class should check Angel for announcements and borrow class notes from a fellow student. On the other hand, *students with prolonged or frequent absences because of illness or other difficulty should get in contact with us as soon as possible.* **It will be difficult, if not impossible, to pass this course without regular attendance, participation, and reading.**

1. **3 Short paper assignments on various readings to sharpen students’ critical thinking and writing skills. Lowest grade is worth 5%; better two are worth 10%.** Questions will be assigned one week before due date; due dates are in syllabus.
2. **Seminar presentations on readings**. **15%** Cities assume the interdependence of its citizens; no citizen is self-subsistent. In this class, we will function something like a city. To that end, we will rely on one another to improve our understandings of the readings as well as the issues that the readings raise. All citizens should have concern for the common good, and as such, should have informed knowledge about all aspects of city life, but each will have specialized knowledge to contribute to the city’s commonwealth too. To that end, while it is required that everyone read all assignments, students will be assigned to small groups or pairs for some readings assignments and will need to be particularly well-prepared to lead discussion of those readings. Specific guidelines for seminar presentations will be distributed and reviewed in class prior to the such group assignment.
3. **Public performance of short theater pieces for final project,30%** of grade, broken down as follows:
   1. **Written proposal for the performance, justifying choices in light of class readings in both philosophy and theater and oral report (10%)**
   2. **Process journals (10%)**
   3. **Documentation of the performance (written script, videotaping of performance) (10%)**

Throughout the process of creation, you will be asked to document *what* choices you are making, *why* you are making them, *how* the performance engages with issues discussed in class, and by *how* effective the performance is in addressing these issues in an artful manner.

1. **Final Paper: 20%. Final paper: theoretical analysis with defense.** This paper will address the philosophical issues regarding the city that you have engaged with in performance. The goal of the paper will be to defend through critical thinking the choices you have made and how the performance operated. This should challenge you to reflect on the process as well as the public performance – how did having the public there change what you did? Is there a way to properly *perform* citizenship? How did your performance address and wrestle with these ideas and make them operate through the performance?

FINAL COURSE LETTER GRADE CALCULATIONS: A: 94.5-100; A-: 89.8-94.4; B+: 87.6-89.7; B: 83.6-87.5; B-: 79.8-83.5; C+: 77.6-79.7 C: 73.6-77.5; C-: 69.8-73.5; D+: 67.6-69.7; D: 63.6-67.5; F: 63.5 or less

**Students with Disabilities**  
  
In order to receive appropriate accommodations, **students with disabilities must register with the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence and provide relevant and current medical documentation.** Students should contact Mary Ellen Pichiarello (Extension 4039) or Jim Muniz (Extension 4218), 5th floor, St. Thomas Hall, for an appointment. For more information, see <http://www.scranton.edu/disabilities>.   
  
**Writing Center Services**  
  
The Writing Center focuses on helping students become better writers. Consultants will work one-on-one with students to discuss students’ work and provide feedback at any stage of the writing process. Scheduling appointments early in the writing progress is encouraged.

To meet with a writing consultant, stop by during the Writing Center’s [regular hours of operation](http://matrix.scranton.edu/academics/ctle/writing/hours.shtml), call (570) 941-6147 to schedule an appointment, or complete the [Writing Assistance Request Form](http://matrix.scranton.edu/academics/ctle/writing/online-request-form.shtml) online. You can also schedule an online appointment using [Google Docs and Google Talk](http://matrix.scranton.edu/academics/ctle/writing/GOOGLE.PDF).

**Course schedule spring 2011**

**Week 1 (1/31-2/2) Introduction to the Course: Why the City? Why Theater? Why Philosophy? Typology of plays ; Overview of Key Questions about Cities.**

Reading: Harvie, Forward and Introduction, pp. xi; 10-20. In Meagher: Meagher, “Introduction,” pp. 1-9; Conlon, “Cities and the Place of Philosophy,” pp. 199-209

**Week 2 (2/7-2/9) The Old Quarrel between Philosophy and Literature**

Reading: Plato, selections from the *Republic* and *Crito* (selections on Angel and in Meagher, pp. 20-32); Aristophanes *The Clouds*

Video: *The Trial of Socrates*

**Week 3 (2/14-2/16) Antigones and Tragedy**

Reading: Aristotle, *Poetics* (selections on Angel ); Sophocles’ *Antigone* and Introduction by Woodruff

**Short paper 1 due 2/16**

**Week 4 (2/21-2/23) Opening Debates about Theater in the City**

Reading: In Meagher: Rousseau, “Letter to D’Alembert on the Theater”, 72-80. Wilder, *Our Town*.

Video: *The Laramie Project*

**Week 5 (2/28-3/1 What is a city?**

Reading: In Meagher: St. Thomas More, *Utopia,* 55-64; Augustine, *City of God*, 40-47; Weber, “Concepts and Categories of the City,” 102-109; Mumford, “Retrospect and Prospect,” 125-133. *The Vanishing Point* (on reserve).

Video: *The City,* 1939.[*http://www.philosophyandthecity.org/mumford.html*](http://www.philosophyandthecity.org/mumford.html)

***Seminar presentations this week***

**Week 6 (3/6-3/8) What is citizenship?**

Reading: in Meagher: Part II, section B: Citizenship. Introduction, 251; Kemmis, 256-258; Hobbes, *De Cive,* pp. 65-71; Thucydides, Pericles’ Funeral Oration, pp. 14-19; Aristotle, *Politics,* pp. 33-39; Young, “City Life as Normative Ideal,” 163-174; Addams, “The Subjective Necessity of Social Settlements,” 84-93; Mendieta, “A Phenomenology of the Global City,” 219-224

Video: *Twilight Los Angeles,* 3/8

***Seminar presentations this week***

**Short paper 2 due 3/6**

**Week 7 (3/12-3/16) Spring Break—no classes**

**Week 8 (3/20-3/22) Citizenship and Diversity**

Reading: In Meagher: Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” 96-101; West, “Race Matters,” 189-195; Gooding-Williams, “Citizenship and Racial Ideology, 252-55. Fugard, *The Island*; Cornerstone Theater, *An Antigone Story*.

***Seminar presentations this week***

**Week 9 (3/27-3/29) The Built Environment**

Reading:Harvie, “Cultural Materialism,” pp. 22-45. Eno, *Middletown*. In Meagher: Gavin, “The Urban and the Aesthetic,” 140-142; Norberg-Schulz, “The Loss and Recovery of Place,” 150-163; Benjamin, “The Arcades Project,” 115-118; Lefebvre, “Philosophy of the City and Planning Ideology,” 136-139; Weiss, “Urban Flesh,” 225-230

***Seminar presentations this week***

Homework: self-guided walking tours of Scranton via mp3 player

**Week 10 (4/3-4/5) Engels and Foucault; surveillance camera players and other examples of agit prop**

**no classes for Easter break on 4/5;**

**homework: walking tours of Scranton via mp3 player**

Reading: In Meagher: Engels, “The Failure of the City for 19th Century British Working Class,” pp. 234-240; Foucault, “Panopticism,” pp. 146-149.

**Short paper 3 due 4/3**

**Week 11 (4/10-4/12) Performance Theory; Reviewing Typology of plays; social justice.**

Reading: Harvie, “Performance Theory,” pp. 45-78. In Meagher: Bickford, “Constructing Inequality,” pp. 210-218. Aristotophanes, *Lysistrata*

**Week 12 (4/17-4/19) catch-up and brainstorming performances**

**Week 13 (4/24-4/26) performance projects**

**Week 14 (5/1-5/3) Theater workhops with Aaron Landsman**

**Week 15 (5/8-5/10) Performances**

**Week 16 (5/14-18) Final Exam Week**