COMM 512: Rhetorical Criticism  
Fall, 2017  
2:00-4:50 T, ASC 240

COURSE INFORMATION

Critic-in-Chief: Dr. Randy Lake
Office: ASC 206C
Hours: TBA
Contact: ext. 03946; rlake@usc.edu
Course Website: blackboard.usc.edu

Description: This is the foundational course in critical/interpretive methods of communication inquiry. It surveys the major types of critical analysis of the diverse communicative forms (including the discursive, visual, material, and digital) that we encounter daily, including the strengths and limitations of each type. It teaches a systematic method of critical work that is compatible with all of these types. And it considers the value, significance, and risks of critical intervention into sociocultural communication practices.

Objectives: (1) to cultivate appreciation for the role of the critical act in culture and society; (2) to survey the diversity of critical paradigms and methods; (3) to become acquainted with some of the landmark exemplars of criticism; (4) to develop your own capacities as critics; and (5) to produce a publishable piece of criticism

Readings: (1) Brian L. Ott and Greg Dickinson, eds., The Routledge Reader in Rhetorical Criticism (Routledge, 2013) [REQUIRED]; (2) Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Thomas R. Burkholder, Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric (2nd ed.; Wadsworth, 1996) [REQUIRED]; (3) other materials as assigned.

Assignments: The major project for the course will be a finished criticism on the “text” (or critical object) of your choice, to be completed in four stages: a descriptive analysis (DUE September 19), a historical-contextual analysis (DUE October 17), an interpretive analysis that identifies proposed methods (DUE November 7) and a completed, integrated critical essay (DUE November 28). The goal is to produce a presentable/publishable work by semester’s end.

Format: As befits a doctoral seminar, I will talk, you will present/report, and we will discuss (in ascending order of importance).

Tentative Weekly Syllabus
(Revisions are certain, but you’ll receive adequate advance notification.)

Session 1: August 22  
Introduction to the course

Session 2: August 29
The Rise, Fall, and Haunting of a Paradigm


ASSIGNMENT Browse as much of The History and Criticism of American Public Address (3 vols.) as you can and read any one essay (your choice) thoroughly. Come prepared to share what you have learned about what neo-Aristotelianism is, and what it isn’t.

Session 3: September 5

Genre in Criticism


ASSIGNMENT Find an exemplar of generic criticism (a study that employs a genre as an interpretive tool) or metacriticism (a study that theorizes the nature of genre as a critical tool) and prepare a ten-minute report (with handout) that summarizes the study and notes both its contributions to and limitations regarding generic criticism: What can the critic do with this tool? What can’t she do?

Session 4: September 12

Finish Genre

Session 5: September 19

Movement/Collective Rhetoric Criticism


DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSES DUE

Session 6: September 26

Dramatic Criticism


Session 7: **October 3**  
**Turn I: Story**  
**REPORTS**  
[A] narrative criticism; [B] fantasy theme analysis/symbolic convergence theory; [C] mythic criticism  
**READ**  

Session 8: **October 10**  
**Turn II: Ideology, Part 1**  
**READ**  

Session 9: **October 17**  
**Turn II: Ideology, Part 2**  
**READ**  
**HISTORICAL-CONTEXTUAL ANALYSES DUE**

Session 10: **October 24**  
**Turn III: Controversy**

**Session 11: October 31**
Controversy Do-Over

**Session 12: November 7**
The Visual Turn

**INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS DUE**

**Session 13: November 14**
Space, Place, and Public Memory

**Session 14: November 21**
Criticism, Metacriticism, and Publication
We will read in common a selection of manuscripts submitted for publication, as well as actual reviews.

**Session 15: November 28**
Presentation of student projects
FINISHED CRITICISMS DUE