Call for Panels and Papers: *Theory and Criticism Focus Group* – ATHE 2024 Conference

**“Revisioning the Story”**
Atlanta, GA | August 1-4, 2024

Please send questions to Theory and Criticism Conference Planner
Scott Venters (scottventers@gmail.com)

Submission Deadline: January 12, 2024 (to planner Scott Venters – scottventers@gmail.com)
General ATHE Deadline for Complete Panel Submissions: January 16, 2024

Below are several options (A, B, and C) for panel/session proposals and paper/provocation submissions for existing panels.

2024 Conference Theme/Call to Action: Revisioning the Story


Regardless of the particular narrative, the creative act depends on incremental iterations and periods of transformation. As theatre, both in higher education and beyond, and ATHE, as an organization that responds to these imbricated fields, revises their respective stories to encompass the multifaceted, anti-racist, equitable and accessible narratives we hope to animate through our practices and scholarship, how can we transform the stories that surround us to reflect the change we want to see?

For 2024, we respond to this period of rehearsal and revision to move ATHE closer to where we all hope to be. This year’s conference theme – Revisioning the Story – calls us to consider and reconsider the narratives we wish to write for the future.

A. **We seek proposals to present in our annual roundtable event and the Theory and Criticism sessions listed below. Please direct these submissions to Conference Planner, Scott Venters by January 12, 2024.** (scottventers@gmail.com)

The Theory and Criticism Focus Group will accept individual 250-word position paper/provocation/activation abstracts for any and all of the three sessions listed below.

Submissions should include:
1) Abstract (250 words or less)
2) Title
3) Contact information (name, institutional affiliation, email address, and phone number)
4) Bio of 50 words or less
1. **The Limits of Vision in Revisioning**

For all the optic chauvinism attributed to him, Descartes was always suspicious of the sense of vision. In fact, in his *Optics*, Descartes analogized the most purified sight to those who had been born blind and used external, tactile aids to navigate space: “with them, you will find, it is so perfect and so exact that one might almost say that they see with their hands, or that their stick is the organ of some sixth sense given to them in place of sight.” For Descartes, touch was both diffusely encamped within the body (the common sense) and the most proximate physical distention of reason. It was considered common to all animals and simultaneously (with no cognitive dissonance) uniquely human. Like Descartes, we should be cautious of privileging sight above other senses and sensory-phenomenological landscapes in the act of creating and revising stories. What does it mean to think beyond, parallel to, or negligently of vision in considering how stories are experienced, told, revised, and transmitted? What groups would thinking of the act of witnessing as an other-than-vision oriented act include, how would the boundaries of bodies and intersubjective space be reimagined, and what narratives or events would emerge? For this session, the Theory and Criticism Focus Group seeks short position papers or provocations that challenge our bias of sight in constructing, narrating, and “revisioning” experience. Although final drafts of papers/documents can be from 2 to 10 pages, presenters will be asked to present a provocative snapshot of their paper/project/experiment (about 5 minutes) that allows participants and audience members to engage in productive discussions about the nature of sensation and affect in divergent and convergent aesthetic structures. (Please see submission guidelines above regarding abstract and attendant information to be submitted.)

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2. **Friction as Revision: Counternarratives and Counterpublics**

For this session, we invite participants to consider revision as an emergent property or lacuna incorporating the residual effects between two entities. In her study of global connections, *Friction*, Anna Tsing imparts the usefulness of considering what is produced and altered by contact: “A wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of the road; spinning in the air it goes nowhere. Rubbing two sticks together produces heat and light; one stick alone is just a stick. As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogenous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power.” Are these novel arrangements an act of revision, containing portions of accordant and discordant elements of the entangled groups? And how are former asymmetries discursively and somatically identified in these zones of contact, and from what perspective? Considering dominance as a mode that is intersectional and contingent means that competition and collaboration can be coexistent qualities among and within fluctuating groups. However, there are key moments when counternarratives and counterpublics, as Michael Warner relates, lay down visible borders and “define
themselves through such distinctively embodied performance that one cannot lasso them back into general circulation” and thus we must account for a wrinkle, a pocket, or a tear in the discursive fabric and operations of normative sociality. The Theory and Criticism Focus Group seeks papers, projects, and activations that wrestle with revision as frictional contact or encounter. We ask participants to consider what is incorporated in revision’s synthetic process, and what is positioned as supplemental, external, extraneous or subterraneous. What are the counternarratives and counterpublics in circulation in any given instance? Who labels whom antagonistic, and in what iterative mode, and how do multiple narratives of the same event reside alongside or come into conflict with one another? Submissions can be projects, events, lectures, papers, provocations or performances lasting 5 to 7 minutes. If your submission is a portion of a longer work, please plan on using your time to provide an overview or section of that project. (Please see submission guidelines above regarding abstract and attendant information to be submitted.)

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3. **The Event and its Relation to Revision**

What is an event and what is its relation to revisioning performance history? According to Slavoj Žižek, “from time to time something happens which as it were retroactively changes the rules of what is possible.” Events are, in Žižek’s thinking, generated by situational encounters but also have retroactive epistemic ramifications oriented toward futurity. Thomas Postlewait confesses that events are, from a certain perspective, “constructed” by the historian and require ethical and methodological considerations in their fabrication. Perhaps seeking to answer “What is an event?” is to go on an errant journey in search of illusory certainty. But we can ponder how we cite events, delimit their boundaries, ultimately think events into narrative and social form, and explore the mechanisms, ecological imbrications, and social parameters that force some events to spill over their localized container into universal, hyperevent status. What are the events that get recorded as events per se? What makes them events, and if they are constructed, at least in part, who or what is doing the construction? Finally, as performance scholars and historians, can and should we consider our work outside the paradigm of the event, or in doing so, would we negate the directives that entail or continued functional existence? Is event, then, not “something” situational, not “real” or ecologically improvised in a sense, but rather a praxis maintained under social and economic protocols, or even duress? We invite all forms of consideration of events and how, as a disciplinary field, we identify, manage, maintain, cite, and form them, etc. For this roundtable, we are accepting all types of examinations of events – papers, performances, happenings, manifestos, pedagogical studies, etc. Participants will have approximately 5 minutes to present their specific project (if desired), but it is expected that complete (or nearly complete) documents will be uploaded to a shared drive approximately one week prior to
the conference. (Please see submission guidelines above regarding abstract and attendant information to be submitted.)

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4. **Historical and Contemporary Ecologies of Artificial Intelligence**

What does it mean to revise (in fact, "regenerate") as generative AI has become increasingly embedded in our engagement with writing criticisms? What is the story that we "revise/ regenerate" and whose story is it? Given its vast potential for harm and benefit, where do we draw the lines for public and private ownership of AI and its products? If AI requires interactive modes, can we even consider the output a product or is it rather an entangled becoming? And what does this mean for instruction and supporting critical thinking? For many, Artificial Intelligence is a tale currently unfolding, and our affiliative and discriminatory interactions with it are being constantly cognized and appraised. And although some of the technological apparatus might be new, is the structure of AI and its relation to the human new in itself, or is the adjectival descriptor “new” in need of revision by incorporating more broadly historical and transcultural perspectives? For this session, Theory and Criticism asks participants to think globally and historically about the many iterations and facets of artificial intelligence. We envision this panel to be a roundtable discussion about the guises, drawbacks, and blessings of artificial intelligence in our personal and scholarly experiences. Submissions could be pedagogical/andragogical in nature, formal papers, collaborative studies, provocations, etc. The objective will be to incorporate discussion of your work into a general discussion about Artificial Intelligence. Participants will have approximately 5 minutes to present their specific project (if desired), but it is expected that complete (or nearly complete) documents will be uploaded to a shared drive approximately one week prior to the conference. (Please see submission guidelines above regarding abstract and attendant information to be submitted.)

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**B. Curated Session Proposals with Theory and Criticism: DEADLINE January 12, 2024**

These are panel/session ideas for which you would like Theory and Criticism’s support organizing. Please submit your session or panel proposals by January 12, 2024 to Scott Venters, scottventers@gmail.com. See section “C” for a list of ATHE’s submission format and content guidelines. These are helpful when submitting directly to Theory and Criticism.

This year’s conference is focused on the Theme/Call to Action - “Revisioning the Story” – Like the 2023 ATHE conference, the emphasis, both within T&C and ATHE at large, will be placed
on how we engage with one another’s work and how we do scholarship as much as the specific contents of our sessions and panels. Our shared objectives are to aim for inclusivity, reciprocity, and interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary action. In short, this new model obviates the traditional three-person presentational panel.

ATHE is aiming for activities and meetings that centrally incorporate or address the needs of 10+ members involved in forms of conjoint action. So, think along the lines of working sessions, workshops, or roundtables as preferred formatting paradigms: flipped models, discussion-based sessions, shared activities, focus group partnerships, etc.

We seek complete session proposals for the 2024 conference that include a broad range of theoretical/critical interrogations and applications based on the theme of “Revisioning the Story.” We encourage multidisciplinary dialogues across the fields of performance scholarship and praxis that serve the needs of a high number of participants. We also seek participants from a variety of focus group affiliations.

The Theory and Criticism Focus Group supports broad definitions of criticism and performance, and therefore encourages a wide range of examples and topics. Feel free to explore both historical and contemporary critics and theorists, in popular culture, academic scholarship, and performance praxis. Panel proposals that engage scholarly conversation in creative and inclusive ways are highly encouraged.


Complete session proposals should be submitted directly to the ATHE website (https://pheedloop.com/athe2024/proposal/start/?call=CALSX6WWE1IFD1G). You must have the names for all participants ready for the proposal. The website includes submission information and forms. The session proposal deadline is January 16, 2024. Below is a list of requirements listed on ATHE’s submission form:

- A main contact for the session -- this might be you, or someone else you’re working with on the proposal
  Important! Whoever is listed as the main contact is the person who will be receiving all information about the session, if chosen. Make sure that you designate someone that is organized!
- A title for your session
- A brief summary of what the session will be about or how it supports transforming our practices (25 words)
- A longer description/abstract of the session so that the Focus Groups can understand what’s being accomplished (450 words max)
• The type of session you’re proposing (roundtable, panel with papers, on-your-feet workshop, etc.)
• Names, contact information, and presentation titles for the other people involved in the session
• Accessibility request(s) for your group

Please Note:
• Individuals do not need to be a member of the Theory and Criticism Focus Group or ATHE to submit single presentations or panels. However, if chosen and scheduled, participants must become members of ATHE by the time of the conference.
• Single Focus Group Sessions can address questions to the conference planner (scottventers@gmail.com) before submitting their proposal.
• Multidisciplinary proposals must be authorized by TWO sponsoring ATHE focus groups. Email and get authorization from each focus group’s conference planner before submitting.
• For more detailed information, see the ATHE website.
• If you have an individually authored paper that you would like to present but does not fit in the roundtables series or the curated panels, please email an abstract to Scott Venters (scottventers@gmail.com) before the December 12th deadline and he will help it find a home.

*THREE TIPS FOR FIRST-TIME PANEL ASSEMBLERS*
1. Consider inviting panelists with a range of theatrical perspectives and backgrounds.
2. Conference panels can be helpful networking tools. Instead of assembling a panel of only your cohort-mates, consider inviting a senior scholar whose work you’ve cited recently. Clearly and briefly explain the core idea of the proposal, the reason you’re inviting them, and ask if they’re working on anything they’d like to present.
3. Alternatively, it can be helpful to give panelists clear options: “Dear senior scholar, I am putting together a panel on [X]. I greatly admire your work on [X-related] and would love for you to present in this area. Of course, we would be thrilled with whatever you would like to contribute, but please consider that you might do A, B, or C