

HL4012 – Advanced Studies in Drama: Documents for a National Theater

Meets: Wednesdays 2:30–5:20
Location: LHS-TR+41
Professor: Dr. Kevin Riordan

Office: HSS 03-72
Consultation hours: by appointment
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In *Theatre & Nation*, Nadine Holdsworth writes: “Theatre, as a material, social and cultural practice, offers the chance to explore national histories, behaviours, events and preoccupations in a creative, communal realm that opens up potential for reflection and debate” (6). Across a full-stop, however, she proceeds, “But it is more than this.” This course joins Holdsworth in thinking about those rich intersections *and* how theater and nation are “more than this.” We will focus on contemporary Singapore drama while making strategic comparison to contemporaneous American plays. Throughout, we will interrogate the generic peculiarity of the “play,” a work to be read as both “a record and as an instigation” (Worthen 10). A play—more than other genres—is never quite one with itself: It always gestures back to its previous performances (as a record) and ahead to new ones (as an instigation). To reckon with plays in a national context, we will consult source materials, drafts, and design plans; we will study the subsequent reviews, published versions, and critical assessments. We will witness and document how a “play” is only one articulation in a longer series of historical and theatrical events.

This course expands and deepens students’ understanding of drama, theater, and performance. Our work will both include and move beyond the study of plays as literary objects, to more fully engage with embodied performances in the real world and with how those performances are documented. Through the assignments, we will reckon with how our own reading and writing interacts with theater’s “records” and “instigations.”

Per NTU convention there are no formal prerequisites for this course. That said, it is my expectation that students have significant interest and have taken other modules in theater, drama, and/or performance studies. At the 4000-level, this course’s workload is substantial in terms of reading, writing, and participation.

Core Readings:

Alfian, *Cooling-Off Day*
Kaufman, *The Laramie Project*
Sharma, *Best Of*
Tan, *Fear of Writing*
Course Reader (Available on B1 of HSS)
Selected Theater Performance

Course Assignments and Assessment:

Preparation, Participation, and Presentations	20%
Script Analysis	15%
Found Play	20%
Performance / Play Review	20%
In-Class Timed Writing	25%

Late Policy: All written work is due in hard copy and on NTU Learn by the start of class. Late work will be accepted within twenty-four hours for a reduced grade and it will receive no instructor comments.

Prospective Itinerary

Week 1 – National Language, National Theater

January 12 – Boey, “National Theatre;” *National Language Class* (in class)

Week 2 – Origin Stories: A Table Read

January 19 – from Lim, *Mimi Fan*; Yeo, from *Are Your There Singapore?*

Week 3 – Siting a National Conversation

January 26 – Kaufman, *The Laramie Project*; Brecht, “The Street Scene”
Script Analysis due

No Class – Chinese New Year

Week 4 – Citing a National Conversation

February 9 – Alfian, *Cooling-Off Day*; Thum, “A Short History of Elections in Singapore”

Week 5 – First Person, Singular

February 16 – Sharma, *Best Of*; Tan, “One Small Voice: The Monodrama in Singapore Theatre”

Week 6 – Theater’s National reckonings

February 23 – Holdsworth, from *Theatre & Nation*; Schneider, from *Performing Remains*
Found Play due

DRAFT - Subject to Change

Week 7 – Tigers and True War Stories

March 9 – Joseph, *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*; O’Brien, “How to Tell a True War Story;”

Week 8 – Documenting the Process

March 16 – Huzir, *Occupation*; Oon, *#unicornmoment*

Week 9 – History’s Holes

March 23 – Parks, *The America Play*
Performance / Play Review due

Week 10 – Pen to Paper: Performance as Drama

March 30 – Tan, *Fear of Writing*, Rae, “‘Leeet lor’: Singapore Plays as Drama”

Week 11 – Classics, Revisited

April 6 – Reading TBD

Week 12 – Singapore Theater as a World Theater

April 13 – Rae, “Where is the Cosmopolitan Stage?”; from Westlake, *World Theatre*
In-Class Timed Writing