

HL4012 – Advanced Studies in Drama: Documenting Theater

Meets: Wednesdays 2:30–5:30
Location: LHS-TR+27
Professor: Dr. Kevin Riordan

Office: HSS 03-72
Consultation hours: by appointment
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William Worthen suggests that a dramatic text is positioned to be read both as “a record and as an instigation” (10). Worthen here signals the way in which a play—more so 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). In this course, we decenter the literary script as the primary site of analysis and study the network of related documents that circulate around, and help produce our sense of, a given “play.” 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 “play” is only one articulation in a longer series of theatrical texts and 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 find documented form. Through the assignments, we will reckon with how our own reading and writing serve to negotiate theater’s “records” and “instigations.” Our readings will mostly be contemporary so as to engage with and learn from current theatrical theory and practice.

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*
Bechdel, *Fun Home*
Joseph, *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*
Kaufman, *The Laramie Project*
Oon, *#UnicornMemes*
Course Reader (Available on B1 of HSS)
Selected Theater Performance

Course Assignments and Assessment:

Preparation, Participation, and Presentations	20%
Field Work	10%
Found Play	15%
Final Essay	35%
Performance Review	20%

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 – What Is Happening

January 13 – Schechner, from *Between Theater and Anthropology*; Phelan, from *Unmarked*

Week 2 – Writing the Event

January 20 – Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight;” Chua, from “Slow Boat to China” (selections)

Week 3 – Theatricalizing the Real

January 27 – Kaufman, *The Laramie Project*; Brecht, “The Street Scene”

Week 4 – Making People Talk

February 3 – Alfian, *Cooling-Off Day*; Thum, “A Short History of Elections in Singapore”

Week 5 – Researching / Rehearsing the Traumatic

February 10 – Bechdel, *Fun Home*

Field Work due

Week 6 – Staging the Real

February 17 – Kron and Tesori, *Fun Home* (selections); Liew, *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye* (selections)

Week 7 – Documentary Dramaturgy

February 24 – Group readings TBD

Found Play draft due

Recess

Week 8 – The Theatrical Real

March 10 – Martin, from *Theatre of the Real*; Schneider, from *Performing Remains*

Week 9 – True War Stories

March 17 – O’Brien, “How to Tell a True War Story;” Theater Mitu, </remnant> (in-class)

Found Play due

Week 10 – True Stories, Continued (with Talking Ghost-Tigers)

March 24 – Joseph, *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*

Week 11 – Getting Personal (Mediated)

March 31 – Oon, *#nijomoment*

Performance Review due

Week 12 – The Real and the Personal Mythologized

April 10 – Lee, *Songs of the Dragons Flying from Heaven*; Als, “Real Gone Girl”

Week 13 – Object Lessons

April 17 – Gross, from *Pupper*; July, from *It Chooses You*; Rayner, from *Ghosts*

April 25 – Final Essay due