

HL4012 – Advanced Studies in Drama: Documenting the Present, the Past

Wednesdays 2:30–5:20, LHS-TR+55 (The Hive)
Kevin Riordan | kriordan@ntu.edu.sg | SHHK 03-72 (by appointment)

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 reconsider the role of 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 a “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 and with how those performances find documented form. Through the assignments, we will reckon with how our own reading and writing 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 Sa’at, *Cooling-Off Day* (9789810714062)
Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (0618871713)
Moisés Kaufman, *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* (0413771709)
Moisés Kaufman, *The Laramie Project* (0822217805)
Haresh Sharma, *Best Of* (9789810900144)
Course Reader (Available on B1 of SHHK)
Selected Theater Performance

Course Assignments and Assessment:

Preparation, Participation, and Presentations	20%
Field Work	15%
Found Play	15%
Performance Review / History	20%
In-Class Timed Writing	30%

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

Week 2 – Writing Events

January 18 – Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight;” Chua, from “Slow Boat to China;” Brecht, “The Street Scene”

Week 3 – Theatricalizing the Real

January 25 – Kaufman, *The Laramie Project*

Week 4 – Citing a National Conversation

February 1 – Alfian, *Cooling-Off Day*; Thum, “A Short History of Elections in Singapore”

Week 5 – First Person, Singular

February 8 – Sharma, *Best Of*; Tan, “One Small Voice: The Monodrama in Singapore Theatre”
Field Work due

Week 6 – Illustration, Drama

February 15 – Bechdel, *Fun Home*; Kron and Tesori, *Fun Home* (selections)

Week 7 – How to Tell a True Story

February 22 – Schneider, from *Performing Remains*; O’Brien, “How to Tell a True War Story”
Found Play Draft due

Recess

Week 8 – Theater as National History

March 8 – Parks, *The America Play*
Found Play due

Week 9 – Histories of National Theatre (Table Reads)

March 15 – Lim, *Mimi Fan*; Yeo, *Are Your There Singapore?* (in class)

Week 10 – Histories of a National Theatre

March 22 – Boey, “National Theatre;” *National Language Class* (in class); Elected play (TBD)

Week 11 – Trials of History

March 29 – Kaufman, *Gross Decency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*; Wilde, The Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
Performance Review / History due

Week 12 – Trials of the Moment

April 5 – Friedman, “Teaching Queer Theory beyond the Western Classroom;” Rebecca G., “project SALOME: A Shared Silhouette, Redressed;” Wong, “Oscar Wilde in Singapore: Ambivalence, Enforcement, and the Criminalization of Homosexuality”

Week 13 – Writing the End

April 12 – In-class Timed Writing