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 and ahead to new ones. 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 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 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
Lee, Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven
Oon, #UnicornMoment
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 16 – Schechner, from Between Theater and Anthropology; Phelan, from Unmarked

Week 2 – Writing the Event

Week 3 – Theatricalizing the Real
January 29 – Kaufman, The Laramie Project; Brecht, “The Street Scene”

February 6 – No Class – Chinese New Year

Week 4 – Making People Talk
February 13 – Alfian, Cooling-Off Day; Thum, “A Short History of Elections in Singapore”

Week 5 – Researching / Rehearsing the Traumatic
February 20 – Bechdel, Fun Home
Field Work due

Week 6 – Staging the Real
February 27 – Kron and Tesori, Fun Home (selections); Liew, The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye (selections)

Recess

Week 7 – The Theatrical Real
March 13 – Martin, from Theatre of the Real; Schneider, from Performing Remains
Found Play draft due

Week 8 – Found Play Workshop + True War Stories
March 20 – O’Brien, “How to Tell a True War Story;” Weiss, The Investigation (selections); Sacco, Palestine (selections)
Found Play due

Week 9 – True Stories, Continued (with Talking Ghost-Tigers)
March 27 – Joseph, Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo

Week 10 – Staging the Personal (Mediated)
April 3 – Gon, #unicornmoment
Performance Review due

Week 11 – The Real and Personal Mythologized
April 10 – Lee, Songs of the Dragons Flying from Heaven; Als, “Real Gone Girl”

Week 12 – Exiting the Theater
April 17 – TBD

April 25 – Final Essay due