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 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
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 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**

**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, #unicornmoment
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 *Puppet*; July, from *It Chooses You*; Rayner, from *Ghosts*

April 25 – Final Essay due