

ENG 634: Studies in Drama
Fall 2009: Mon 4PM
Katy Ryan (kohearnr@mail.wvu.edu)
Office Hours: Thurs 9:00-11:00 and by appointment
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**THEATRE OF RESPONSE:
20TH-CENTURY and CONTEMPORARY US AMERICAN PERFORMANCE**

Together we organize the world for ourselves, or at least we organize our understanding of it; we reflect it, refract it, criticize it, grieve over its savagery; and we help each other to discern, amidst the gathering dark, paths of resistance, pockets of peace, and places from whence hope may be plausibly expected.

--Tony Kushner, Afterword to *Homebody/Kabul*

Well: all that can be said is that the contrast between learning and amusing oneself is not laid down by divine rule; it is not one that has always been and must continue to be.

--Bertolt Brecht, "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction"

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This semester, we will chart and study US American plays and performances that, over the past 100 years, have addressed social crises and called for justice. Many of these explicitly political plays were staged with the hope of inciting direct social action: freeing the "Scottsboro Boys," for instance, striking against unfair wages and hours, preventing war, abolishing sexual discrimination. We will begin with Angelina Weld Grimké's anti-lynching play, *Rachel*, the winning submission in a NAACP writing contest that invited theatrical responses to the 1915 racist film, *Birth of A Nation*. (*Rachel* is also, according to Judith Stephens, the "earliest extant non-musical written, produced, and publicly performed by African Americans.") A number of our performances respond to imprisonment and the death penalty: an agit-prop by Langston Hughes about the Scottsboro case; an expressionist play by Sophie Treadwell loosely based on the execution of Ruth Snyder; an episodic prison play by Tennessee Williams, only recently found among his papers; and a controversial play about a US military brig originally performed by the Living Theatre in 1963 and revived in 2007. Moving chronologically through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, we will also explore theatrical forms—melodrama, expressionist, Living Newspapers, agit-prop, epic, social realist, and performance art—and consider if one form seems particularly well-suited for moving audiences politically or, as Tony Kushner suggests, if there is not a theatrical "hierarchy to political efficaciousness."

As we study the public character of performance, we will also address its marginalized status in English departments and a longstanding British and US American "antitheatrical prejudice" (Jonas Barish). If drama is a neglected genre in literary studies, American drama is particularly sidelined; and our plays might be said to be on the margins of the margin—unless that's where you live, in which case you're home. Performance theories, however, if not theatrical productions, have become vital to cultural and American studies, and so, with Julia Walker, we will ask, "why performance, why now?"

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at WVU Bookstore & the Book Exchange)

Irwin Shaw, *Bury the Dead*
Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty*
Tennessee Williams, *Not About Nightingales*
Sophie Treadwell, *Machinal*

Manuel Piñero, *Short Eyes*
Maria Irene Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends*
Philip Kan Gotanda, *Yankee Dawg You Die*
Tim Miller, *Body Blows*
Mimi D'Aponte, ed. *Seventh Generation: An Anthology of Native American Plays*
Tony Kushner, *Homebody / Kabul* (revised version)

REQUIREMENTS/OPPORTUNITIES

1) Reader Responses

On our listserv, everyone will post at least six responses to our readings (approximately 500 words each). Pace your responses throughout the semester and try to post by at least 4PM on Sunday, so we all have a chance to read the responses before we meet on Monday. In any given response, you obviously do not need to touch on everything you have read for that week. Choose one idea or question to develop. Be sure to ground your responses in the language of our dramatic texts. Please bring me a hardcopy and write the number on each response. Our listserv can also serve for follow-up discussions and announcements.

2) Writing and Creative Projects

Your first project will be an essay (approx. 10 pp) that develops a critical or theoretical argument based on course material. I will collect proposals (250-500 words) about two weeks before the due date, and we will have an in-class writing workshop the week before the final essay is due.

For the second major project, you can compose another research essay or create any of the following: an original script, a performative essay, or a staged production (either for the class, a limited audience, or the public). These can be individual creations or collaborations.

3) Performances

Everyone will be in two performance groups. Each group will collaborate on a ten-minute performance that engages with our week's reading. Performances are ungraded (except as participation), informal, and great fun. Usually groups meet at least once outside of class to prepare. Feel free to rearrange the classroom, incorporate the audience, bring in props, costumes, music, etc. You do not need to memorize anything (though we'll all be impressed if you do). Most importantly, your performance should provide us with a certain take on a play, performance, or theory. At the end of the performance, the audience will have a chance to respond, and the performers can say a few words about their process and intent. (Also see handout for ideas.)

The performance group will also be responsible for preparing three questions related to the week's reading materials. The group can work on these questions together or each person can come up with one or two questions (depending on the number in your group). We will use these questions to propel class discussion.

4) Discussion

This class will strengthen your ability *to think*—to question, analyze, reflect, dispute, and reason. Dialogue is essential to this process. There will be a variety of ways to participate: providing feedback to performers, asking questions of one another, reading from your written responses, and responding to our texts. If you have difficulty communicating in classrooms, please make an appointment early in the semester to speak with me.

GRADING

Six Responses	20%
Participation/Performances	20%
First Essay	30%
Second Essay/Script/Performance	30%

READINGS ON E-RESERVE (in order we will be reading them)

Username: ryan2

Password: 557

Carol Dawn Allen, *Peculiar Passages: Black Women Playwrights 1875-2000*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. Chapter Two. 57-82.

Susan Harris Smith, *American Drama: The Bastard Art*. Introduction: The Problem of American Drama 1-8; Chapter 2: Generic Hegemony 9-12; Chapter 4: Did She Jump, or Was She Pushed 114-158.

William Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism Between the Wars*. New York: Columbia UP, 199. Chapter 4.

Michael Thurston, *Making Something Happen*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2001. 94-114.

Douglas McDermott, "The Workers' Laboratory Theatre: Archetype and Example." *Theatre for Working-Class Audiences in the United States, 1830-1930*. Eds. Bruce McConachie and Daniel Friedman. Wesport, CN: Greenwood P, 1985. 121-142.

Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the 20th c.* (1997) Chapter 1. 3-50.

Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction* (1993). Chapter 1. (recommended)

Thomas Fahy, " 'In Dark Corners': Masculinity and Art in Tennessee Williams's *Not About Nightingales*." *Captive Audiences: Prison and Captivity in Contemporary Theatre*. Eds. Thomas Fahy and Kimball King. New York: Routledge, 2003. 136-146.

Arnold Aronson, *American Avante-Garde Theatre: A History*. London: Routledge, 2000. Chapter 3

Erika Munk, "Only Connect: The Living Theatre and its Audiences." *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*. Eds. James M. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2006: 33-55. (e-reserve)

Fiona Mills, "Seeing Ethnicity: The Impact of Race and Class on the Critical Reception of Manuel Piñero's *Short Eyes*." *Captive Audience*. 41-64.

Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1985. 80-115.

Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander, "Introduction: Disability Studies in Commotion with Performance Studies." *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*. Eds. Sandahl and Auslander. 1-29. (e-reserve)

Maria Irene Fornes. Interview with Una Chauduri. *Speaking On Stage: Interviews with Contemporary American Playwrights*. Eds. Philip C. Kolin and Colby H. Kullman. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1996. 98-114. [Under "Chauduri"]

Tony Kushner, Interview with David Savran, *Speaking on Stage* 291-313. [Under "Savran"]

RECOMMENDED READING

Theoretical Work and Criticism

Alicia Arrizón, *Latina Performance: Transversing the Stage*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999.

J.L. Austin. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962.

Herbert Blau. *The Audience*. John Hopkins UP, 1990.

- . *Take Up the Bodies: Theatre at the Vanishing Point*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1982.
- . "Universals of Performance; or amortizing play" in *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*. Eds. Richard Schechner and Willa Appel. Cambridge UP, 1990. 250-272.
- Elaine Brousseau. "Personalizing the Political in *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*" in *Staging Resistance: Essays on Political Theatre*. Eds. Jeanne Colleran and Jenny S. Spencer. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1998..
- Marvin Carlson. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 1996
[Review by Shannon Jackson in *Theatre Journal* 49.3 (1997), available on Project Muse]
- Sue-Ellen Case. *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990.
- Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Randall. Berkely: U of California P, 1984.
- Elin Diamond. "The Violence of "We": Politicizing Identification." *Critical Theory and Performance*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992.
- Harry Elam and David Krasner, eds. *African American Performance and Theater History*. Oxford UP, 2001.
- Jill Dolan. *Feminist Spectator as Critic*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1988/91.
- Thomas Fahy and K. King, *Peering Behind the Curtain: Disability, Illness, and the Extraordinary Body in Contemporary Theatre*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Guerrilla Girls. *The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art*. New York: Penguin 1998.
- Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan, eds. *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993. 55-84.
- Michael Hatt. "Race, Ritual, and Responsibility: Performativity and the Southern lynching" *Performing the Body / Performing the Text*. Eds. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Bruce Henderson and R. Noam Ostrander, "Introduction to Special Issue on Disability Studies/Performance Studies." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 28. 1-2 (2008): 1-5. (Project MUSE)
- Kim Marra and Robert A. Schanke, eds. *Staging Desire: Queer Readings of American Theater History*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2002.
- José Esteban Muñoz. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Alan Reed. *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach, eds. *Critical Theory and Performance*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992.
- Nicolas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems*. Cambridge UP, 2006.
- Joseph Roach. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia UP, 1996.
- Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander, eds. *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2005.
- Richard Schechner. *Performance Theory*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Judith L. Stephens, "The Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro Movement." *Cambridge Companion to American Women Playwrights*. Ed. Brenda Murphy. Cambridge UP, 1999: 98-117.

RELEVANT COLLECTIONS OF PLAYS

William Branch, ed. *Black Thunder: An Anthology of African American Plays*. New York, Signet 1992.

Kathy Perkins and Roberta Uno, eds. *Contemporary Plays by Women of Color*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Kathy Perkins and Judith L. Stephens, eds. *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

PBS on Political Theatre: <http://www.pbs.org/now/arts/politicaltheater.html>

Lydia Sargeant, "Humor, Theatre, and Social Change,"

<http://zmagazine.zmag.org/Feb2005/sargent0205.html>

Political art and critical commentary, including reviews of recent plays:

<http://www.apracticalpolicy.org>

Guerilla Girls: www.guerrillagirlsontour.com

Junebug Productions: <http://www.gnofn.org/~junebug/>

Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School: <http://authors.aalbc.com/blackartsmovement.htm>

Association for Theatre in Higher Education: <http://athe.org>

7.84 Theatre Company: <http://www.784theatre.com>

CALENDAR

NOTE: As indicated in parentheses, some reading material will be found on the WVU Library online databases, Project MUSE and JSTOR.

Aug 24 Introductions. Opening remarks on political theatre
 Sign up for performances

EARLY 20TH-C.: MELODRAMA and EXPRESSIONISM

Aug 31 *Rachel*, Angelina Weld Grimké (perf. 1916, publ. 1920)
 Available at Google Books:
 <http://books.google.com/books?id=UpA0AAAAMAAJ&printsec=copyright&dq=grimke+rachel#PPA67,M1>

Carol Dawn Allen, chapter 2 from *Peculiar Passages* (e-reserve)

Sarah J. Blackstone, selection from "Women Writing Melodrama." *Cambridge Companion to American Women Playwrights*. (19-mid 22 of handout)

Susan Harris Smith, selections from *American Drama* (e-reserve)

Sept 7 Labor Day—No class

Sept 14 Marita Bonner, *Purple Flower* (1928) and *Exit, an Illusion* (1929) in *Black Female Playwrights* (handout)

Sophie Treadwell, *Machinal* (1928)

Jerry Dickey, "The Expressionist Moment: Sophie Treadwell." *Cambridge Companion to American Women Playwrights*. 66-81 (handout)

Ginger Strand, "Treadwell's Neologism: *Machinal*." *Theatre Journal* 44 (1992): 163-175. (JSTOR)

1930s: AGIT-PROP and WORKERS' THEATRE

- Sept 21 Langston Hughes, *Scottsboro, Limited* (1931) (handout)
- William Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left* (e-reserve)
- Michael Thurston, *Making Things Happen* (e-reserve)
- Michael Denning, Chapter 1 in *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the 20th c.* (1997) (e-reserve)
- Recommended: Dan Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South*
Strange Fruit (documentary film)
Scottsboro: An American Tragedy (documentary film)
- Sept 28 Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty* (1935)
- Irwin Shaw, *Bury the Dead* (1936)
- Douglas McDermott, "The Workers' Laboratory Theatre: Archetype and Example" (e-reserve)
- The Federal Theatre Project & Arthur Arendt, *One-Third of a Nation* (watch clip in class)
- Bertolt Brecht, "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction" and "The Street Scene" (1935-36) (handout)
- Recommended: Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction* (1993). (chapter available on e-reserve)
- Oct 5 Tennessee Williams, *Not About Nightingales* (1939)
- Thomas Fahy, " 'In Dark Corners': Masculinity and Art in Tennessee Williams's *Not About Nightingales*." *Captive Audiences* 136-146. (e-reserve)
- Tony Kushner, et al. "How Do You Make Social Change." *Theater* 31.3 (2001): 62-93. (Project MUSE)
- Julia Walker, "Why Performance, Why Now? Textuality and the Rearticulation of Human Presence." *Yale Journal of Criticism* 16.1 (2003): 149-175.

Proposals due for first writing project

MID 20TH-C.: SOCIAL REALISM and “BLOWTORCH” REALISM

- Oct 12 **Writing Workshop**
Full essay draft due in class
In class, we will watch scenes from Kenneth Brown, *The Brig* (1963)

Arnold Aronson, Chapter 3 in *American Avante-Garde Theatre* (e-reserve)

Erika Munk, “Only Connect: The Living Theatre and its Audiences.” (e-reserve)
- Oct 19 Manuel Piñero, *Short Eyes* (1974)

Fiona Mills, “Seeing Ethnicity: The Impact of Race and Class on the Critical Reception of Manuel Piñero’s *Short Eyes*.” (e-reserve)

Bert States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*. Chapter 3. (e-reserve)
- Oct 26 Maria Irene Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977)

Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander, “Introduction: Disability Studies in Commotion with Performance Studies.” (e-reserve)

Ann M. Fox and Joan Lipkin, “Res(crip)ting Feminist Theatre Through Disability Theatre: Selections from the DisAbility Project.” *NWSA Journal* 14.3 (2202): 77-98 (Project MUSE)

Josephine Lee, “Pity and Terror as Public Acts: Reading Feminist Politics in the Plays of Maria Irene Fornes.” *Staging Resistance: Essays on Political Theatre*. Eds. Jeanne Collieran and Jenny S. Spencer. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1998. (handout)

Fornes, Interview with Una Chaudhuri. *Speaking On Stage*. (e-reserve)

CONTEMPORARY STORYTELLING, PERFORMANCE ART, and EPIC THEATRE

- Nov 2 Philip Kan Gotanda, *Yankee Dawg You Die* (1989)

Diane Glancy, *The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Danced for the Deer Dance* (1995)

Mimi Gisolfi D’Aponte’s Introduction to *Seventh Generation* ix-xxiii
- Nov 9 Leanne Howe and Roxy Gordon, *Indian Radio Days* (1993)

Spiderwoman, *Power Pipes* (1993) in *Seventh Generation*

Dwight Conquergood. “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research.” *Performance Studies Reader*. 311-322. [handout]

- Nov 16 Tim Miller, *My Queer Body* (1994) and *Body Blows* (2002)
- Jill Dolan, "Performance, Utopia, and the 'Utopian Performative.'" *Theatre Journal* 53.3 (2001): 455-479. (JSTOR)
- Nov 23 Thanksgiving—No Class
- Nov 30 Tony Kushner, *Homebody / Kabul* (2001)
- Kushner, Interview with David Savran. *Speaking On Stage* (e-reserve)
- Kushner, Interview at *Salon*, "Coming Out as a Socialist"
<http://www.salon.com/weekly/interview960610.html>

Proposals due for Final Project

- Dec. 7 **Concluding Thoughts**
Writing/Performance Workshop
Final Projects due by Dec. 14 at noon

WVU College of Creative Arts Theatre Schedule (at the CAC on the Evansdale Campus)

The World Goes Round at the Gladys G. Davis Theatre
 Music and Lyrics of John Kander and Fred Ebb
 September 25 & 26, 2009 at 7:30pm
 September 29 & 30, 2009 at 7:30pm
 October 2 & 3, 2009 at 7:30pm
 September 27 & October 4, 2009 at 2pm

Dracula at the Lyell B. Clay Concert Theatre
 by Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston,
 from Bram Stoker's novel
 October 21, 22, and 23, 2009 at 7:30pm
 October 25, 2009 at 2pm

The Love of the Nightingale at the Gladys G. Davis Theatre
 by Timberlake Wertenbaker,
 based on the myth of Philomela by Ovid
 November 19 & 20, 2009 at 7:30pm
 December 1 – 5, 2009 at 7:30pm
 December 6, 2009 at 2pm

Sign Up for Performances (2 or 3 students in each group)

- Aug 31 Angelina Weld Grimke, *Rachel* (1915) [antilynching, melodrama]
- Sept 14 Marita Bonner, *Purple Flower* (1928) or *Exit, an Illusion* (1929) [racism, experimental]
- Sept 21 Langston Hughes, *Scottsboro, Limited* (1931) [executions, agit-prop]
- Sept 28 Irwin Shaw, *Bury the Dead* (1936) [antiwar, agit-prop]
- Oct 5 Tennessee Williams, *Not About Nightingales* (1939) [prisons, expressionist]
- Oct 19 Manuel Piñero, *Short Eyes* (1974) [prisons, social realist]

- Oct 26 Maria Irene Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977) [feminism, experimental]
- Nov 2 Philip Kan Gotanda, *Yankee Dawg You Die* (1989) [Asians in Hollywood, episodic, comedy]
- Nov 9 Leanne Howe and Roxy Gordon, *Indian Radio Days* (1993) or Spiderwoman's *power pipes*
Native American histories & traditions, radio, dance, storytelling]
- Nov 16 Tim Miller, *My Queer Body* (1994) or *Body Blows* (2002) [sexual liberation, solo performance art]
- Nov 30 Tony Kushner, *Homebody / Kabul* (2001) [war, globalism, epic theatre]

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Email Sign Up

Name _____ Email _____ Alt Contact if needed