

Theatre and Society
THR309, Fall 2012
Mondays, 1:30 – 4:20
LEW 219

Prof. Jill Dolan
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Office Hours: Thursdays, 2-4 and by appointment

Course Description

“Theatre and Society” is meant to investigate the ways in which theatre and performance speak into their cultural and historical moments. We’ll look at self-avowed political drama or performance in various historical moments in American theatre; at plays or performances that caused controversy in various communities in which they were performed; and at community-based performance produced for specific reasons within its locale. We’ll also discuss, frequently and intently, the role of the artist in society. What is the artist’s responsibility to his or her nation? To his or her local community? How does the artist (or *should* the artist) represent his or her identity community? How does an artist participate as a citizen of a democratic nation? We’ll also explore the notion of the “artist/scholar/citizen” as a useful position from which to speak. Our readings will engage a variety of plays and performances live, as written texts, or on DVD. Visits from and workshops with guest artists will help frame our discussions and will provide a practical component to the course.

Course Schedule

Week #1: No class, Rosh Hashanah

Monday, September 17

Week #2: Introduction

Monday, September 24 (1st meeting)

Reading:

- Lorraine Hansberry, *Raisin in the Sun* (L)
- Bruce Norris, *Clybourne Park* (L)

Events:

- Thursday, September 27: *United in Anger* showing, documentary about ACT-UP, with talk back with producers/directors after, 7 p.m., Stewart Theatre, 185 Nassau

Week #3: The Politics of Dramatic Theatre

Monday, October 1 (2nd meeting)

Reading:

- Anne Bogart, *And Then, You Act: Making Art in an Unpredictable World* (New York: Routledge, 2007). (L)
- Richard Greenberg, *Take Me Out* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2003). (L)
- The Universes, *Slanguage*, in *The Fire This Time: African American Plays for the 21st Century*, Harry J. Elam, Jr., and Robert Alexander, eds. (New York: TCG, 2004), 511-595. (ER)
- Quiara Alegría Hudes, *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, in *Front Lines: Political Plays by American Women*, Alexis Greene and Shirley Lauro, eds. (New York: The New Press, 2009), 91-131. (ER)

Events:

- Thursday, October 4, *Critical Encounters*, jointly sponsored by ENG, CAAS, and AMS, presents a reading of Philip Kan Gotanda's new play about Chang and Eng Bunker, the original "Siamese twins," followed by a conversation with the playwright himself in 106 McCormick at 4:30. The student-performed reading will be directed by Prof. Bob Sandberg.
- Thursday, October 4, Nezaket Ekici performance installation, 185 Nassau, Matthews Acting Studio; 8:00 p.m. performance. <http://fertile-crescent.org/performances.html>.

Week #4: Constructing Communities

Monday, October 8 (3rd meeting)

Reading:

- Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), chapter one, "Introduction: Feeling the Potential of Elsewhere," 1-1-34; chapter six, "Militant Optimism: Approaching Humanism," 139-165. (ER)
- Ann Carlson, "Site/Dance" (under Course Materials on Blackboard and other short pieces on line)
- Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Engaging Performance*, chapter one, "Putting Plays to Use," 17-41; chapter three, "Self-Representing: Testimonial Performance," 67-89. (L)

Recommended:

- Sonja Kuflinec, *Staging America: Cornerstone and Community-Based Theatre* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), chapter one. (ER)

Workshop: Ann Carlson, <https://arts.stanford.edu/visitingartists/ann-carlson>;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ann_Carlson.

Week #5: Solo Performance: Is the Personal Political? Is the Personal Always Personal?

Monday, October 15 (4th meeting)

Reading:

- Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), chapter three, "Finding our Feet in One Another's Shoes: Multiple Character Solo Performance," 63-88. (ER)
- Danny Hoch, *Jails, Hospitals, and Hip-Hop* (DVD) (ER)
- Nilaja Sun, *No Child*, in *Front Lines: Political Plays by American Women*, Alexis Greene and Shirley Lauro, eds. (New York: The New Press, 2009), 287-314. (ER)
- Reno, *Rebel Without a Pause* (DVD) (ER)
- Chris Strickling, "The Actual Lives Performance Project: A Pedagogy of Difference," in Kathleen Juhl and Ann Elizabeth Armstrong, eds., *Radical Acts: Theatre and Feminist Pedagogies of Change* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 281-302. (ER)
- Anne Basting, Alzheimer's project web site, TimeSlips, <http://www.timeslips.org/>.

Events:

- Wednesday, October 17, Fawzia Afzal-Kahn performance, *Scheherazade Goes West*, Stewart Theatre, 185 Nassau, 7:00; discussion after performance moderated by Prof. Dolan <http://fertile-crescent.org/performances.html>. Recommended reading: Fawzia Afzal-Khan, "Scheherazade Goes West," *TDR: The Drama Review* 48.2 (Summer 2004): 15-23. (ER)

Week #6: Guerrilla Theatre

Monday, October 22 (5th meeting; midterm week)

Reading:

- James M. Harding, *Cutting Performances: Collage Events, Feminist Artists, and the American Avant-Garde* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), chapter six, "Forget Fame: Valerie Solanas, The Simplest Surrealist Act, and the (Re)Assertion of Avant-Garde Priorities," 151-173. (ER)
- Valerie Solanas, "The SCUM Manifesto" (TK/ER)
- Mary Harron, dir., *I Shot Andy Warhol*, film (ER)
- Boal, invisible theatre (TK)
- Guerrilla Girls (online)

Workshop: Final projects

Week #7: Fall Recess

Monday, October 29

Week #8: Constructing a Theatre Commons

Monday, November 5 (6th meeting)

Look through websites:

- Jumper (Diane Ragsdale) <http://www.artsjournal.com/jumper/>
- Artivate (Linda Essig) <http://www.artivate.org/>
- HowlRound (Polly Carl) <http://www.howlround.com/>
- CAN/Art in the Public Interest (Linda Frye Burnham, Community Action Network) <http://www.apionline.org/>
- Culturebot (Andy Horowitz) <http://www.culturebot.org/>

Reading:

- Anne Bogart, "Zelda Fichandler," in *Conversations with Anne* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2012), 167-190; "Ben Cameron," 343-364. (ER)
- Carol Becker, "The Artist as Public Intellectual," *The Subversive Imagination*, 236-246. (ER)
- Carol Becker, "Social Responsibility and the Place of the Artist in Society," in *Zones of Contention: Essays on Art, Institutions, Gender, and Anxiety* (Buffalo: SUNY Press, 1996), 27-36. (ER)
- Polly Carl, "Truthiness in the Politics of Theatre," *HowlRound*, September 9, 2012, http://www.howlround.com/truthiness-in-the-politics-of-theater-by-polly-carl/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+HowlRound+%28HowlRound.com%27s+Journal%2C+Blog%2C+%26+Podcasts%29 and Polly Carl, <http://www.howlround.com/a-boy-in-a-mans-theater-by-polly-carl/>, "A Boy in a Man's Theatre," *HowlRound*, April 24, 2012.

Workshop: Polly Carl, HowlRound, Emerson College

<http://www.howlround.com/author/pccarl/>; <http://www.emerson.edu/news-events/emerson-college-today/emerson-announces-center-theater-commons>

- Monday, November 5, 5:30 at Rutgers, Betty Shamieh, *The Alter-Ego of an Arab-American Assimilationist* (performance); <http://fertile-crescent.org/performances.html>. Bus provided back and forth. See <http://www.bettyshamieh.com/>.

Week #9: Politics of Actor Training

Monday, November 12 (7th meeting)

Reading:

- Lissa Tyler Renaud, "Training Artists or Consumer: Commentary on American Actor Training," in *The Politics of American Actor Training*, Ellen Margolis and Lissa Tyler Renaud, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 76-93. (ER)
- Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Engaging Performance: Theatre as Call and Response* (New York: Routledge, 2010), chapter seven, "Training: An Engaged Artist Prepares," 165-192. (L)
- Jill Dolan, "The Elephant in the Room: Some Thoughts on the Training of Actors in Higher Education," *Teaching Theatre* 19.4 (Summer 2008): 19-21. (ER)
- Claudia Tatinge Nascimento, "Burying the (Monologue) Book: Disobeying the Rules of Gender Bias in Beginning Acting Classes." *Theatre Topics* 11.2 (September 2001): 145 - 158. (ER)

- Carol Becker, "The Education of Young Artists and the Issue of Audience," in *Zones of Contention: Essays on Art, Institutions, Gender, and Anxiety* (Buffalo: SUNY Press, 1996), 57-70. (ER)
- Lauren Love, "Resisting the 'Organic': A Feminist Actor's Approach," in Phillip Zarrilli, ed., *Acting (Re)Considered: Theories and Practices* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 275-288. (ER)

Week #10: Politics of Casting

Monday, November 19 (8th meeting) Thanksgiving week

Reading:

- Angela Pao, *No Safe Spaces: Re-casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), "Introduction," 1-22; chapter one, "Bearing the Weight of Reality: The Theatricality of Cross-Racial Corporeal Encounters," 23-41. (ER)
- Brandi Wilkins Catanese, *The Problem of the Color[Blind]: Racial Transgression and the Politics of Black Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), chapter one, "Bad Manners: Talking About Race," 1-31; chapter two, "The End of Race or the end of Blackness? August Wilson, Robert Brustein, and Color-Blind Casting," 32-71. (ER)
- Mary Cutler, "Typed for What?" in *The Politics of American Actor Training*, Ellen Margolis and Lissa Tyler Renaud, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 137-141. (ER)
- Stephen Adly Guirgis, *The Motherfucker With the Hat* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2011). (L)
- Danny Hoch's piece about playing Latino
- Sean Hayes controversy over playing straight

Guest: Prof. Brian Herrera, Princeton <http://princeton.academia.edu/BrianHerrera>

Week #11: Critical Contributions

Monday, November 26 (9th meeting)

Reading:

- Henry Bial, "The Play Review as a Means of Querying Difference, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Performative," in Scott Magelssen and Ann Haugo, eds., *Querying Difference in Theatre History* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007) 25-30.
- Introduction, Jill Dolan, *Feminist Criticism for Stage and Screen* + "How To" section (ER)
- Sonja Kuflinec, Tim Miller, Bill Rauch, and David Román, "Critical Relations: The Artist and Scholar in Conversation," *Theater* 33.3 (2003): 119-131. (ER)

Online discussions of criticism:

- Superfluties, <http://www.superflutiesredux.com/2012/09/06/if-a-critic-ran-a-theatre/>
- Culturebot; etc. (urls TK)

Workshop: Karen Fricker, *The Guardian*, Royal Holloway

[http://pure.rhul.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/karen-fricker\(763992dd-3f1e-460a-aa31-b4ddae0927c9\).html](http://pure.rhul.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/karen-fricker(763992dd-3f1e-460a-aa31-b4ddae0927c9).html)

Week #12: Documentary Theatre

Monday, December 3 (10th meeting)

Reading:

- The Civilians, (*I am*) *Nobody's Lunch* in *The Civilians: An Anthology of Six Plays* (New York: Playscripts, Inc., 2009, 69-104. (ER)
- Emily Mann, *Greensboro (A Requiem)* in *Testimonies: Four Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1997), 246-330 (ER)
- Michael Mizell-Nelson, "Not Since the Great Depression: the Documentary Impulse Post-Katrina," in *Civic Engagement in the Wake of Katrina*, Amy Koritz and George J. Sanchez, eds. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 59-77. (ER)
- Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Engaging Performance*, chapter four, "Cultural Organizing: Multiple Modes of Communication," 90-110. (L)
- **Strongly Recommended:** The Tectonic Theatre, Moisés Kaufman, *The Laramie Project*

Workshop: Emily Mann, Artistic Director/Resident Playwright, McCarter Theatre, Princeton

http://www.mccarter.org/AboutUs/AboutDefault.aspx?page_id=39

Week #13: Manifestos

Monday, December 10 (11th meeting)

Last day of class

Reading:

- Selections from *Theatre in Crisis? Performance Manifestos for a New Century*, Maria M. Delgado and Caridad Svich, eds. (Manchester England, Manchester University Press, 2002). Selections: "Theatre in crisis? Performance Manifestos for a New Century," Delgado and Svich; "Theatre in Crisis?" Svich; "Some Quick Thoughts on Theatre and Its Future," Cortinas, Beber, and Lucas; "Some Words about the Theatre Today," Roberta Levitow; "Hold Your Nerve," Phyllis Nagy; "The Crisis of Label," Alice Tuan; "Scavenging for Home," Lisa D'Amour; "Bad Glamour," Erik Ehn. (ER)
- **Strongly recommended:** Tony Kushner, *Angels in America, Parts I & II*

Reading period, January 9th (11th meeting)

Presentations and final discussion, 11 – 3:00 (lunch provided), Room 219, 185 Nassau St.

Dean's Date, January 15: All final work due via email attachment by 5:00 p.m.

Course Assignments

Since this is a once-per-week seminar class, your regular attendance is required, and consistent, high-quality oral participation is assumed. You should plan to contribute actively in each class session, offering concise and succinct observations about the reading or performances and engaging your colleague's ideas. Don't be late for class; consistent lateness will lower your final course grade. More than one absence, for any reason, will lower your final grade by at least one letter. If you have questions about your class participation, your lateness, or your absences and how they're affecting your grade, please email me or visit me in office hours.

Assignments:

1. **Five-minute in class report on an organization that addresses theatre and its role in society (10%)**. The report should include written notes of ~250 words to be posted on Blackboard by 8 a.m. the day of our class meeting. You'll set your own deadlines for these reports, in consultation with me. Organizations might include: Free Southern Theatre; Cornerstone Theatre; Roadside Theatre; Imagining America; Theatre Communications Group; Sojourn Theatre (Michael Rohd); Animating Democracy; various identity-based theatre advocacy groups and companies (for women, LGBT, people of color, ethnicity); etc.
2. **In-class reports to supplement discussions (30%)**, no more than five minutes each, about the plays/playwrights/productions we're reading. You can sign up for these on the syllabus and cycle them through the semester. The reports should include written notes of ~100-250 words to be posted on Blackboard by 8 a.m. the day of our class meeting:
 - a. *Biographical*, on the playwright(s), with one or two interesting anecdotes not easily found.
 - b. *Production history*, with detailed information—including images—on one exemplary performance: how it looked, what choices were made, who was cast, and what that might have meant to the production; what the reviews had to say.
 - c. *Dramaturgical questions*, about the play's form and content, to begin our conversation. For instance, "Why is the play organized around 'episodes' instead of scenes?" Or, "Why are the characters called 'The Lady in' a color of some sort?"
3. **Production or play analysis of something we've not seen or read in class (25%)**, turned in on a date of your choice, to be pre-arranged with me, during the semester. Productions or plays must be selected and due dates arranged by **October 8th**. Send me an email indicating which production you'll see, where, and why, or which play you'll read and why, and **when you'll turn in your first draft** (~500 words; final draft 750-1000 words). **Your second draft will be due one week after I return the first draft with comments**. More details about this assignment (i.e., organizing questions, things to look for, etc.) to come.
4. **Final project/paper (35%)**, structured in parts: idea-generating workshop, 10/22; 150-word proposal, describing your paper's thesis argument or your performance or project concept, including at least three sources on which you'll draw, due before class via email attachment, 11/26; oral presentation or performance of your final work during Reading Week, 1/9; final project/paper, due Dean's Day via email attachment by 5 p.m., 1/15).

Ideas for projects:

- a. A research paper about/analysis of a play we haven't read (approx. 10 pages or 2500 words).
- b. An essay-length response to the theory or history we've read (approx. 10 pages or 2500 words).
- c. A series of reviews of relevant plays for the *Prince* or a similar print or internet news outlet (adding up to approx. 2500 words).
- d. A 5-10 minute original performance (solo, pairs, or group), that in some ways addresses the materials of the class. The performance could be site-specific (that is, performed in a location of your choice that's meaningful to the work); could be in a theatre you reserve and arrange; or could be in the classroom. The parameters depend on what you want to accomplish by embodying some of the ideas and issues of the class for your colleagues. No more than 10 minutes of performance, plus a three-page/750-word written explanation/assessment of your work.
- e. An artistic response to a play, production, or performance, drawn from materials inside or outside of class. This might be a painting, drawing, or sculpture; a short play; a series of poems, etc.
- f. A critical journal, cataloguing your responses to an issue related to theatre and society that you follow throughout the semester (for example, the issue of color-blind casting or guerrilla theatre) in the press or on line, engaging with the ideas dialogically.
- g. A paper, project, or performance of your devising, approved by me in advance.

**I don't accept late work at any point during the semester and I do not give incompletes.
Please plan to finish your work on time.**

How to Do Well in This Course

The central goal of our class will be to discuss what we read together in a lively, specific, spirited conversation each week. We'll read from/do scenes from the plays and listen to reports on playwrights and productions. Come prepared with questions about what you read and be ready to engage with questions about what you hear. You'll do well if you read closely; engage actively in class; throw yourself in to workshops and exercises. There are no right answers in this class; only committed, energetic engagement with a series of what I hope will be provocative texts.

Come to class on time, with the reading in front of you, thoroughly read and prepared. Make your reports informative, interesting, colloquial, and succinct. Ask one another questions; talk to your colleagues, not just to me. Imagine yourself as not "just" a student, but as someone with a stake in the project of theatre and society—as an artist, a spectator, a critic, a donor, a producer, etc. Be invested in what we read, even if it's only imaginatively.

Come see me in office hours if you have any doubts at all about your work in the class, or even if you just want to chat. My office hours are time I set aside each week for you. Email me any time at all with questions or concerns. Enjoy yourself! The course is meant to be pleasurable as well as informative and thought-provoking.