

## **Theatre Activism/Activist Writing**

Augusto Boal, the founder of the theatrical form known as the Theatre of the Oppressed, once stated that “Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it.” Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century, theatre and performance has been used a means of political protest and activism. From early twentieth-century Soviet Russia, when agitprop trains toured the country-side after the October Revolution, through to the early twenty-first, when Occupy Wall Street protestors were arrested for staging nude performance art in the streets, theatre and performance has continued to play a key role in effecting social change. In this course, we will be utilizing theatre as a collaborative, educational, and political process that helps us to critically and carefully articulate our hopes, dreams, and strategies for building a future that is socially just. By reading, thinking, and writing about oppressive ideologies and practices as they are represented in dramatic literature and a wide range of performance practices we will, as a class, learn to use our writing to encourage “liberatory” collective and individual responses to the actual conditions of our lives.

Over the course of the semester, students will build up a portfolio demonstrating that they have acquired the kind of writerly expertise needed by both theatre scholars/artists and contemporary activists. The portfolio will include 1) a journal containing short critical reflections on our weekly readings and class activities 2) a scene analysis of a play-script 3) a Letter to the Editor of a local (or student) newspaper and 4) an argumentative research essay that makes use of both practice-based and scholarly evidence.

Please note, students are expected to take part in short acting activities in class, as well as participate in a more substantive “Legislative Theatre” activity. However, you will be graded only on your participation and writing assignments, and not on your acting ability. As Boal once said, “all human beings are actors (they act!),” so amateur actors are more than welcome in this class!

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND PRACTICES**

Upon satisfactory completion of this class, students will be able to:

1. critically analyze and interpret primary and secondary source materials
2. evaluate and make effective use of both practice-based and scholarly research in writing
3. write compelling arguments that define the problems that motivate argumentation, make reasonable, debatable arguments, and adapt writing modes to suit different audiences and contexts.

They will have also:

4. developed good habits of drafting and revision
5. learned to collaborate productively with one another through informal discussion, formal presentation, feedback, and peer review
6. acquired discipline-specific knowledge of reference and style guides.

Students will have achieved these objectives through a wide range of research and writing processes and practices, including:

1. Carrying out close analytical analyses of dramatic and critical scholarly works

2. Participating in large and small group discussion and theatre activities
3. Formulating challenging yet achievable research questions and goals
4. Undertaking sustained revision of multiple pieces of writing
5. Conscientiously completing multiple peer review sessions
6. Editing for style and clarity.

## COURSE TEXTS

- Boal, Augusto. *Legislative Theatre: Using Performance to Make Politics*. Trans. by Adrian Jackson. Routledge, 1998.
- ---. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Trans. by Adrian Jackson. Routledge, 2002.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *The Threepenny Opera*.
- Cohen-Cruz, Jan. *Engaging Performance: Theatre as Call and Response*. Routledge, 2010.
- Churchill, Caryl. *Cloud 9*.
- *Duke Chronicle*
- Kershaw, Baz and Helen Nicholson. *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*. Edinburgh University Press, 2011.
- Lipkin, Joan. "On the Case for Devising Theatre for Social Justice on College Campuses." *Theatre Topics* 26.2 (2016), 255-260.
- Prentki, Tim and Sheila Preston. *The Applied Theatre Reader*. Routledge, 2009.
- Sword, Helen. *Stylish Academic Writing*. Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Whitton, David. "The Practical Turn in Theatre Research." *Forum Modernes Theater* 24.1 (2009), 77-88.

## ASSIGNMENTS

### 1. Participation and Journal 15%

Journal will contain seven 1-2 page reflections on our weekly readings and activities (up until LT Performance)

### 2. Scene Analysis, 3-4 pages, 15%

### 3. Letter to the Editor, 2-3 Pages, 20%

Students will write a Letter to the Editor articulating their stance on a social justice issue that they feel needs to be addressed in their community (this might include responding to previous letters published); 2-3 pages

### 4. Argumentative Research Essay, 10-12 Pages

Including Proposal (10%) and Essay (40%)

## SCHEDULE

### Week 1

1. **Topic:** Introduction to Theatre Activism | **Read:** Cohen-Cruz, "Introduction" to *Engaging Performance: Theatre as Call and Response* (pp. 1-13, "Kinship Among Engaged Performance Practices" and "Purposes of Writing this Book")
2. **Topic:** Scripted Political Drama | **Read:** Cohen-Cruz, "Playwrighting: Putting Plays to Use" (in *Engaging Performance*, pp. 17-41) | **Write:** Journal Response on what you hope to gain from this course, in relation to the ideas put forth in this week's readings.

### Week 2

**1. and 2. Topic:** Brecht and the Poetics of Representation | **Read:** Prentki, "Introduction to Poetics of Representation" (pp. 19-21) and Willett (ed.) "Brecht on Theatre" (pp. 28-32) in *The Applied Theatre Reader*; Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera* | **Write:** Journal Response detailing how you would stage a scene from *The Threepenny Opera*.

### Week 3

**1. and 2. Topic:** bell hooks, Churchill, and the Ethics of Representation | **Read:** Preston, "Introduction to Ethics of Representation" (pp. 65-69) and hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" (pp. 80-85) in *The Applied Theatre Reader*, and Churchill, *Cloud 9* | **Write:** Journal Response detailing how you would stage a scene from *Cloud 9*

### Week 4

**1. Topic:** Applied Theatre Practice as Research | **Read:** Whitton, "The practical turn in theatre research" and Kershaw et al, "Practice as Research: Transdisciplinary Innovation in Action"  
**2. Topic:** Boal and Participation | **Read:** Preston, "Introduction to Participation" (127-9) and Boal, "Theatre of the Oppressed" (130-37) in *The Applied Theatre Reader*; Cohen-Cruz, "Specta(c)ting: theatre of the oppressed, orthodoxy and adaptation" | **Write:** Scene Analysis Essay Due

### Week 5

**1. Topic:** Forum Theatre in Practice | **Read:** Selections from Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (TBC) | Come to class prepared to move (be sure to wear appropriate clothing)!  
**2. Class Cancelled - Must attend See Saw Performance/Workshop in lieu of class | Write:** Journal Response on Games for Actors activities and See Saw workshop.

### Week 6

**1. Class cancelled - Must attend See Saw Performance/Workshop in lieu of class**  
**2. Topic:** Choosing a Topic for Legislative Theatre performance | **Read:** Letters to the Editor in the Duke Chronicle and Lipkin, "On the Case for Devising Theatre for Social Justice on College Campuses" | **Write:** Journal response describing 2-3 social justice issues you feel need to be addressed at Duke

**FALL BREAK: Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> - Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup>**

### Week 7

**1. Topic:** Letters to the Editor of the Duke Chronicle | **Read:** Sample Letters (TBC)

### Week 8

**1. Topic:** Legislative Theatre | **Read:** Boal, "Prologue" (pp. 3-5), "The Proposition," "The Context," and "The Structure" (pp. 19-39) in Boal, *Legislative Theatre*  
**2. Topic:** Peer Review of Letters | **Read:** no readings | **Write:** Draft of Letter to the Editor Due

### Week 9

**1. Topic:** Legislative Theatre | **Read:** "A Compact Course on Playwriting and Theatre Arts" and "The Show and the Community" (pp. 53-101) in Boal, *Legislative Theatre*  
**2. Topic:** Legislative Theatre | **Read:** "Family: A Playscript" (195-210)

### Week 10

1. **Topic:** Legislative Theatre Rehearsal | **Read:** no readings | **Write:** Final Revised Letter to Editor Due
2. **Topic:** Legislative Theatre Rehearsal | **Read:** no readings | **Write:** Journal Entry Reflecting on Final Legislative Theatre performance  
*All Students Must Participate in Legislative Theatre Final Performance*

#### **Week 11**

1. **Topic:** Writing a Research Proposal **Read:** Selections from *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*
2. Class Cancelled (to make up for evening/weekend attendance at LT Performance)

#### **Week 12**

1. Class Cancelled (to make up for evening/weekend attendance at LT Performance) | **Write:** Draft Proposal and Bibliography Due
2. **Topic:** Drafting

#### **Week 13**

1. **Topic:** Crafting | **Read:** Selections from *Sword, Stylish Academic Writing* | **Write:** Final Revised Proposal and Bibliography Due
2. **Topic:** Citation and Style | **Read:** no readings

#### **Week 14**

1. **Topic:** Peer Review of Drafts | **Read:** no readings | **Write:** Draft of Final Research Essay Due

**THANKSGIVING BREAK: Wed Nov. 25<sup>th</sup> – Sunday Nov. 29<sup>th</sup>**

#### **Week 15**

1. **Topic:** Polishing | **Read:** Peer's Essay for Review
2. **Topic:** Reflections and Transferring Writing Skills | **Write:** Final Research Essay Due