

arDRAMA 494: Special Topics
“Performing Social Justice”

Winter 2022

HUT 202

University of Washington

School of Drama

Professors Jasmine Mahmoud & Nikki Yeboah

jmahmo@uw.edu | nyeboa@uw.edu

Mondays & Wednesdays, 9:30 - 11:20am

Office Hours: W, 11:30am -12:30pm or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What are the stakes of engaging histories and practices of social justice through performance and artmaking? How does an attention to narrative and the body animate social movements? The objective of the course is to engage histories and practices of social justice through performance and artmaking. Topics of study include abolition, race and racism, gender, sexuality, indigeneity, decoloniality, disability, and protest.

In particular, this class leads students through three units to understand various genres of performance, and the ways in which performance is tactically mobilized in social justice movements. **Unit I, “Understanding and Theorizing Performance and Social Justice,”** centers the understanding and theorizing of forms of performance (including theater, dance, and performance art) to understand presentational aesthetic forms, and to engage issues and movements including race, gender, sexuality, decoloniality, and the movements for Black, Indigenous, and Asian lives. Through this unit, students will learn to connect their own personal narratives to the social systems of which they are a part. **Unit II, “Scripting and Rehearsing Social Justice,”** centers the study of theatre, documentary performance, dramatic texts, and performance art as forms of representation, presentation, repertoire, embodiment, and imagination that engage in issues and movements including anti-lynching, Civil Rights, LGBTQIA+ Rights, and Abolition. A central question is how does the representational power of theatre and the presentational power of performance art archive, reflect, and reimagine more just societies? Through this unit, students will learn genres of performance, and how to script work that engages social justice. **Unit III, “Staging, Intervening in, and Imagining New Worlds,”** engages tools of performance for social justice including Theatre of the Oppressed, Playback Theatre, and the narrativized body as a tool of protest. This unit spans across genres to engage the reflexive works of poets, psychotherapists, abolitionists, and solo performers who use performance as a way to unpack historic and structural oppressions including the carceral system, slavery, the academy, and the state. In groups, students will work to stage collaborative performances that confront injustice and imagine more just worlds. This course is designed for students with little to no prior theater, performance, or artistic experience.

REQUIRED TEXT

Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Translated by Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985

All other texts available via Canvas.

COURSE STRUCTURE

The course structure of “Performing Social Justice” emphasizes student creative and participatory learning experiences in dialogue with course reading, content (including the screening of performances), and guest speakers. The class meets twice a week, often with one day dedicated to discussion of readings, critical theories, and broader performance histories, and the other day dedicated to an embodied performance workshop in which students exercise and explore social justice -- and course themes -- through artistic practices. The weekly outline below provides a sense of the structure and content of the course. In Week 10 the reading load is reduced so that students can focus on honing their final projects, a group performance project. Most reading and listening assignments will be made available on Canvas; Assignments include weekly reflections, a creative project for each unit, and a performance review of a Seattle-area performance that engages social justice. In addition, guest speakers -- who work on social justice and performance -- will be invited across the course to amplify learning. *This course mostly meets in person but also includes online meetings via Zoom as marked in the syllabus.*

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Document and identify forms of performance (including theater, performance art, and dance), and performance across artistic, cultural, and everyday realms
- Define and utilize concepts associated with identity, social movements, and social justice such as Abolition, Class, Racial Capitalism, Race and Racism, Reparations, Gentrification, Gender, Sexuality, Decoloniality, the Anthropocene, Disability, Art, and Aesthetics
- Understand the ways in which performance has been used in social justice movements including abolition, anti-racism, feminism, immigration, ability, and the anthropocene
- Reflect and connect social justice concepts – including identity, privilege, and oppression – to personal and professional identities and action
- Practice creative and research methods of inquiry (observation, mapping, oral history interviewing, documenting aesthetics, scripting forum theatre, and playback theatre) to understand their use towards social justice

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Fuller rubrics on Canvas / see course time schedule below for specific due dates

- **Weekly Reflections. (20%)** Due on Wednesday at 9am, these weekly pre-assignments ask specific questions of course content. On Get Done before class assignments /Pre-Assignment/ Weekly Reflections (Short Responses to the Readings):
- **Performances/Scripts (40%):**
 - Unit I (short solo performance due Week 2): 5%
 - Unit II (script / reading due Week 6): 15%
 - Unit III (Group Performance Project due Week 10): 20%
- **Writing / Research & Reflection (25%):**
 - Unit II Performance Review of *FANNIE* - 10%
 - Unit III Final Individual Reflection Essay - 15%
- **Participation & Attendance (15%)**

COURSE POLICIES

Modifications to Syllabus

Although we anticipate following this syllabus closely, the course is designed to facilitate discussion and foster students' understanding and articulation of the subject matter. Especially given this current era, we reserve the right to modify the syllabus and schedule at any time during the quarter in order to ensure that students are grasping the concepts in full. All students will receive adequate notice of any changes. Changes will be announced during class, posted on Canvas, and sent in an e-mail message to all enrolled students.

Penalties for Late Work and Requests for Extensions

Late short assignments receive half-credit. Other late work will be penalized a third of a letter grade (from A to A-, for example) for every 24 hours the assignment is late.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity

The University takes academic integrity very seriously. Behaving with integrity is part of our responsibility to our shared learning community. If you're uncertain about if something is academic misconduct, ask me. I am willing to discuss questions you might have.

Acts of academic misconduct may include but are not limited to:

- Cheating (working collaboratively on quizzes/exams and discussion submissions, sharing answers and previewing quizzes/exams)
- Plagiarism (representing the work of others as your own without giving appropriate credit to the original author(s))
- Unauthorized collaboration (working with each other on assignments)

Concerns about these or other behaviors prohibited by the Student Conduct Code will be referred for investigation and adjudication by (include information for specific campus office).

Students found to have engaged in academic misconduct may receive a zero on the assignment (or other possible outcome).

Access and Accommodations

Your experience in this class is important to us. It is the policy and practice of the University of Washington to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have already established accommodations with Disability Resources for Students (DRS), please activate your accommodations via myDRS so we can discuss how they will be implemented in this course.

If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but not limited to; mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), contact DRS directly to set up an Access Plan. DRS facilitates the interactive process that establishes reasonable accommodations. Contact DRS at disability.uw.edu.

Conduct

The University of Washington Student Conduct Code (WAC 478-121) defines prohibited academic and behavioral conduct and describes how the University holds students accountable as they pursue their academic goals. Allegations of misconduct by students may be referred to the appropriate campus office for investigation and resolution. More information can be found online at <https://www.washington.edu/studentconduct/>

Excused Absence from Class

Students are expected to attend class and to participate in all graded activities, including midterms and final examinations. A student who is anticipating being absent from class due to a Religious Accommodation activity needs to complete the Religious Accommodations request process by the second Friday of the quarter. Students who anticipate missing class due to attendance at academic conferences or field trips, or participation in university-sponsored activities should provide a written notice to the instructor ahead of the absence. The instructor will determine if the graded activity or exam can be rescheduled or if there is equivalent work that can be done as an equivalent, as determined by the instructor.

Face Coverings in the Classroom

The health and safety of the University of Washington community are the institution's priorities. Please review and adhere to the [UW COVID Face Covering Policy \[pdf\]](#).

Medical Excuse Notes

Students are expected to attend class and to participate in all graded activities, including midterms and final examinations. To protect student privacy and the integrity of the academic experience, students will not be required to provide a medical excuse note to justify an absence from class due to illness. A student absent from any graded class activity or examination due to illness must request, in writing, to take a rescheduled examination or perform work judged by the instructor to be the equivalent. Students are responsible for taking any number of examinations for which they are scheduled on a given day and may not request an adjustment for this reason alone.

Safety

Call SafeCampus at 206-685-7233 anytime – no matter where you work or study – to anonymously discuss safety and well-being concerns for yourself or others. SafeCampus’s team of caring professionals will provide individualized support, while discussing short- and long-term solutions and connecting you with additional resources when requested.

Title IX

UW, through [numerous policies](#), prohibits sex- and gender-based violence and harassment, and we expect students, faculty, and staff to act professionally and respectfully in all work, learning, and research environments.

For support, resources, and reporting options related to sex- and gender-based violence or harassment, visit [UW Title IX’s webpage](#), specifically the [Know Your Rights & Resources](#) guide. Please know that if you choose to disclose information to me about sex- or gender-based violence or harassment, I will connect you (or the person who experienced the conduct) with resources and individuals who can best provide support and options. You can also access those resources directly:

- Confidential: [Confidential advocates](#) will not share information with others unless given express permission by the person who has experienced the harm or when required by law.
- Private and/or anonymous: [SafeCampus](#) provides consultation and support and can connect you with additional resources if you want them. You can contact SafeCampus anonymously or share limited information when you call.

Please note that some senior leaders and other specified employees have been identified as [“Officials Required to Report.”](#) If an Official Required to Report learns of possible sex- or gender-based violence or harassment, they are required to call SafeCampus and report all the details they have in order to ensure that the person who experienced harm is offered support and reporting options.

Title IX website: <https://www.washington.edu/titleix/>

Support and help page: <https://www.washington.edu/titleix/resources/>

Confidential advocates: <https://www.washington.edu/sexualassault/support/advocacy/>

SafeCampus: <https://www.washington.edu/safecampus/>

Officials Required to Report:

<https://www.washington.edu/titleix/title-ix-officials-required-to-report/>

Related policies: <https://www.washington.edu/titleix/policies/>

COURSE SCHEDULE

UNIT I: HISTORICIZING PERFORMANCE & SOCIAL JUSTICE

Week 1: Introductions to Performance and Social Justice -- on Utopia, Ephemerality, and Social Movements (Virtual)

Course Engagements:

- M, 1/3 - Class meets online via Zoom
- W, 1/5 - Class meets online via Zoom

Assignments:

- Week 0 Reflection: Introduce Yourself due W, 1/5 at 9am via Canvas
- Week 1 Reflection due W, 1/5 at 9am via Canvas

Reading by Wednesday, January 5:

- Jill Dolan, "Introduction: Feeling the Potential of Elsewhere," in *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope in the Theater*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press: 2005, 1-34.
- Robin D. G. Kelley, "'When History Sleeps': A Beginning" *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.
- Salomon Lerner Febres, "Foreword: The Rebellion of Masks," in Cynthia Cohen, Roberto G. Varela, and Polly O. Walker. *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict, Volume II. Building Just and Inclusive Communities*. Oakland: New Village Press, 2011, ix - xi.

Optional:

- Peggy Phelan, Chapter 7: "The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction," *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. Routledge: London and New York, 1993: 146- 166.
- Alicia Garza, "A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement by Alicia Garza," *The Feminist Wire*, 7 October 2014.
- bell hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice," *Yale Journal of Law & Feminism* 4.1 (1991): 1-12.

Week 2: Performance and Race

Course Engagements:

- M, 1/10 - Class meets in person
- W, 1/12 - Class meets in person

Assignments:

- Unit I Short Solo Performance due in class on M, 1/10
- Week 2 Reflection due W, 1/12 at 9am via Canvas

Reading by Wednesday, January 12:

- Harry J. Elam, Jr., “The Device of Race: An Introduction,” in *African American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader*. Edited by Harry J. Elam, Jr. and David Kraser. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 3-16.
- Diana Taylor, “Opening Remarks” in *Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality, and Theatricality in Latin/o America*, edited by Diana Taylor and Juan Villegas. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994: 1-16.
- *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry

In Class:

- Guillermo Gomez-Penz

Optional:

- Josephine Lee, Chapter 1 “Critical Strategies for Reading Asian American Drama,” in *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997: 1-33.
- George Lipsitz, “Introduction,” *How Racism Takes Place*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011: 1-21.
- Jodi Melamed, “Racial Capitalism,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1.1 (Spring 2015): 76-85.
- John O’Neal, Chapter 5: “Do You Smell Something Stinky?” Notes from Conversations about Making Art while Working for Justice in Racist, Imperial America in the Twenty-First Century,” in Cynthia Cohen, Roberto G. Varea, and Polly O. Walker. *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict, Volume II. Building Just and Inclusive Communities*. Oakland: New Village Press, 2011, 125-157.

Week 3: Gender, Sexuality, and Pandemics

Course Engagements:

- M, 1/17 - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday – NO CLASS
- W, 1/19 - Class meets online via Zoom

Assignments:

- Week 3 Reflection due W, 1/19 at 9am via Canvas

Reading:

- Alberto Sandoval, “Staging AIDS: What’s Latinos Got to Do With It?,” in *Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality, and Theatricality in Latin/o America*, edited by Diana Taylor and Juan Villegas. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994: 49-66.
- Tony Kushner, *Angels in America, Part 1 Millennium Approaches*

Optional Reading:

- Marc Arthur, “Nostalgia and Chronicity: Two Temporalities in the Restaging of AIDS,” *Theatre Journal* 73.1 (2021): 19-36.

UNIT II: SCRIPTING AND REHEARSING SOCIAL JUSTICE

Week 4: Documentary Theater

Course Engagements:

- M, 1/24 – Class meets in person
- W, 1/26 - Class meets in person

Assignments:

- Week 4 Reflection due W, 1/26 at 9am
- HOLD for FANNIE at Seattle Rep on date F, 1/28/22 at 7:30PM

Reading:

- Johnny Saldana, Chapter 1: “Introduction to Ethnotheatre and Ethnodrama” in *Ethnotheatre: Research from Page to Stage*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge Press, 2016.
- Nikki Yeboah, *The (M)others*
- *Optional*: Nikki Yeboah, “I Know How It Is When Nobody Sees You: Oral-History Performance Methods for Staging Trauma” in *Text & Performance Quarterly* (2020)

Week 5: Scripting Social Archives and Change – Gender

Course Engagements:

- M, 1/31 – Class meets in person
- W, 2/2 - Class meets in person

Assignments:

- Week 5 Reflection due 2/2 at 9am
- Performance Review of *FANNIE* due F, 2/4 at 11:59pm

Reading:

- (please read by Monday, 1/31): Maegan Parker Brooks, *A Voice that Could Stir an Army*, Introduction
- *Watch with script*: Moisés Kaufman and Stephen Belber, *The Laramie Project*
- Debby Thompson, “The Laramie Project” (review), *Theatre Journal* 53.4 (2001): 644-645

Optional:

- Koritha Mitchell, *Living with Lynching*. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2011, 1-77.

Week 6: Scripting Social Justice – Live Readings (In Person)

Course Engagements:

- M, 2/7 – Class meets in person

- W, 2/9 - Class meets in person

Assignments:

- Unit II Scripts due W, 2/9 at 9am (followed by script reading in class)
- Week 6 Reflection due F, 2/11 at 9am

Reading (Browse as relevant to your script):

- Selections from *Black Lives, Black Words*

UNIT III: STAGING, INTERVENING IN, AND IMAGINING NEW WORLDS

Week 7: Choreographies of Protest

Course Engagements:

- M, 2/14 – Class meets in person
- W, 2/16 - Class meets in person

Assignments:

- Week 7 Reflection due W, 2/16 at 9am

Reading:

- Susan Leigh Foster, “Choreographies of Protest,” *Theatre Journal* 55.3 (2003): 395-412.
- Anusha Kedhar, “‘Hands Up! Don’t Shoot!’: Gesture, Choreography, and Protest in Ferguson,” *The Feminist Wire* 6 October 2014.
- Rodney Diverlus, “Black Lives Matter Toronto: Urgency as Choreographic Necessity,” *Canadian Theatre Review* 176 (Fall 2018: 62-68.)
- *Optional:*
 - Paige McGinley, “‘Experimenting with a New Technique’: Performance and Rehearsal in the Long Civil Rights Movement,” *Theatre Journal* 73.1 (2021): 1-17.
 - *African-American Arts: Activism, Aesthetics, and Futurity*, 41-50, 201-213:
 - Chapter 3: “Pearl Primus’s Choreo-Activism: 1943-1949” by Doria E. Charlson
 - Chapter 13: “Dancing for Justice Philadelphia: Embodiment, Dance, and Social Change” by Julie B. Johnson in *African-American Arts: Activism, Aesthetics, and Futurity*

In Class: Couple in the Cage by Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Pena

Week 8: Theatre of the Oppressed (Virtual)

Course Engagements:

- M, 2/21 – President’s Day – NO CLASS
- W, 2/23 – Class Meets Online

Assignments:

- Week 8 Reflection due W, 2/23 at 9am

Reading

- Selections from Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Ch. 4

Optional:

- Huma Saeed, “Empowering Unheard Voices through ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’: Reflections on the Legislative Theatre Project for Women in Afghanistan—Notes from the Field,” *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 7.2 (2015): 299-326.

Week 9: Playback Theatre and Workshopping Social Justice (In Person)*Class Engagements:*

- M, 2/28 – Class Meets in person
- W, 3/2 – Class Meets in person

Assignments:

- Week 9 Reflection due W, 3/2 at 9am

Reading:

- Cynthia Cohen, Roberto G. Varea, and Polly O. Walker. *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict, Volume II. Building Just and Inclusive Communities*. Oakland: New Village Press, 2011, 3-73, 159-197 (Chapters 1, 2, 4, 6, 7).

Week 10: Staging Social Justice*Class Engagements:*

- M, 3/7 - Class Meets in Person
- W, 3/9 - Class Meets in Person

Assignments:

- Final Performances (open to the public) will take place on Wednesday, 3/9, 5-7pm

Reading:

- *Optional:* Cynthia Cohen, Roberto G. Varea, and Polly O. Walker. *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict, Volume II. Building Just and Inclusive Communities*. Oakland: New Village Press, 2011, 199-238 (Section III and Afterword).