

Theater Arts 250: Community Performance in West Philadelphia

Faculty: Dr. William Yalowitz, byalowitz@dca.net

Subject/Discipline: [Theater Arts](#)

School: [University of Pennsylvania](#)

Project Area:

Spring 1999

Class Meeting Times: Seminar: Mondays, 2-5 (Other meetings as described below)

Office Hours: Arrange with instructor

Contact Information: phone: 438-7817

Course Description and Goals

The course combines work in Performance Studies theory with the application of teaching, directing, and design skills in the production of an inter-generational community performance, at a community site inscribed with local significance. Community performance brings theater artists together with people of a community of location, spirit, or tradition, to tell the stories collected in oral history interviews, animating local architecture and urban landscapes with movement, stories, and sound, and creating collective historical fiction based on local issues and mythologies, students will help to create a community performance as a means for West Philadelphia to celebrate their histories and to show their struggles - in short, to create public discourse through performance-making.

In this course, students will learn the nuts and bolts of creating a community performance project, hands-on. Working with the (ex-) residents of the Black Bottom, a West Philadelphia neighborhood which was razed and displaced by university-driven 'urban renewal' in the 1950s and 60s, along with students from University City High School, our group from Theater 250 will help to conduct research on local issues and local history. We will conduct oral history interviews with community 'storytellers,' working in concert with UCHS students to collect stories and images. These stories then become source material for a theater production, which we will create along with UCHS students and people from the Black Bottom.

In addition to seminar meetings, students will join one of the following Production Committees, which will each hold weekly meetings, TBA:

- University City High School, probably Wed/Fri 12:20-1:50
- Design & Tech
- Oral History Coordination and Transcription
- Scripting
- History Curriculum and Publicity

As the project progresses, rehearsal times will be added to seminar and committee meetings. Rehearsal schedule to be announced.

Course policies

Attendance - Attendance at all seminar meetings and production committee meetings is, of course, mandatory. This course is a combination of academic and applied work. You and your classmates will need to count on one another; in addition, work with people from the community and from UCHS demands utter reliability. Any anticipated difficulties with attendance should be discussed with instructor before they occur.

Assignments

Process Journal: Weekly entries: a log of your personal and artistic journey through the course and project. Your journal will be collected at mid-semester (due Friday, March 6) and again at the end of the semester (to be handed in with the final paper on April 27).

Final Paper: due Monday, April 27

Analyze and reflect on our performance process this semester and your role in it. As points of reference, use your own journal entries on the project in relation to
 (1) the performance theory of Schechner, Turner, Kershaw, Yalowitz, Kuflinec, or Geer
 [choose a motif - transaction, efficacy, ritual-theater spectrum, intercultural dynamics, rhetorical and authenticating conventions]

and

(2) one example of a community performance from the reading list, or one you select yourself

Pay attention to some of the following in your discussion: the role of the artist, your personal learnings regarding race, class, place, and identity, and the interfacing of theater/community activism/education.

suggested length: 10-12 pages

Weekly Schedule

Readings:

Jan 18: Community Performance: Context and Background

- Yalowitz, William. Community Performance, Historical Fictions...
- Goldbard, Arlene. Postscript to the Past: Notes Toward a History of Community Arts
- Geer, Richard Owen. Of the People, by the People and For the People...
- Simpson, Pearl. The Black Bottom Picnic. Unpublished manuscript.

Jan 25: Artists and Communities: Issues of Cultural Transaction

- Kuffinec, Sonja. In Search of America in Your Own Backyard: Cornerstone Theater and Transactions of Community.
- Burnham, Linda Frye. Artists Tell History.
- Burnham, Linda Frye. The Cutting Edge is Enormous.
- Gee, Marie. Yes in My Front Yard: Community Participation and the Public Art Process.
- Schwarzman, Mat. Drawing the Line at Place: The Environmental Justice Project.
- Hammer, Kate. John O'Neal, Actor and Activist: The Praxis of Storytelling.
- Porterfield, Donna. Arts Presenting and the Celebration of a Community's Culture.
- Schechner, Richard. An Intercultural Primer.
- Leonard, Bob. Negotiations: Learning Hard Lessons.

Feb 1: Community performance models and methods

- Yalowitz, William. Community Performance, Historical Fictions, and Intercultural Transactions: *Joshua's Wall* in Mt. Airy, Philadelphia; pp. 31-48.
- Geer, Richard Owen. Swamp Gravy.
- Goler, Veta. Living With the Doors Open: An Interview with Blondell Cummings
- Pottenger, Marty. Making City Water Tunnel #3.
- Geer, Richard. Untitled article on *Swamp Gravy* and community performance.
- Warner, David. Toys in the Attic.
- Killkelly, Ann. We're All at the Table In the Working Class Kitchen.
- Rogoff, Tamar. Writings about the Ivey Project.

Reference Works, On Reserve

- Geer, Richard. (in press). Untitled article on *Swamp Gravy* and community performance.
- Kershaw, Baz. (1992). The Politics of Performance: Radical Theater as Cultural Intervention.
- Schechner, Richard. (1988). Performance Theory.
- Turner, Victor. (1982). From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play.

PROJECT SCHEDULE: *Community Performance in West Philadelphia*

Jan.	seminar	community	UCHS	production
11	<u>Community Performance: Context and Background</u> introduction of current project Introduction and community	calls to storytellers	curriculum meetings with Tom Esposito	initial meetings with tech staff
18	<u>Artists and Communities: Issues of Cultural Transaction</u> Identity and community movement/theater workshop - UCHS prep	oral history interviewing	curriculum meetings with Tom Esposito theater workshop planning	initial meetings with tech staff
25	<u>Community Performance models and methods</u> Committee meetings movement/theater workshop - UCHS prep	oral history interviewing transcribing identifying performers	Black Bottom historical research	drafting of script themes identify site identify musicians
Feb.				
1	Committee meetings UCHS teaching	oral history interviewing transcribing	movement/theater workshop	drafting of script themes

	planning	identifying performers	Black Bottom historical research	
8	Committee meetings Black Bottom Cabaret:	oral history interviewing transcribing identifying performers Sat. Feb. 14, 10pm-3am	movement/theater workshop oral history interviewing at Lancaster Hall,	drafting of script themes costume/set preliminaries 5151 Warren Street. (52nd and Media)
15	Committee meetings	oral history interviewing transcribing identify performers	movement/theater workshop oral history interviewing	drafting of script themes costume/set preliminaries
22	Committee meetings workshop planning	theater workshop	movement/theater workshop oral history interviewing	scripting design work begin publicity
Mar.				
1	Committee meetings workshop planning Journals due, March 6	intergenerational theater workshop	intergenerational theater workshop	scripting design work publicity
8	Spring Break	intergenerational theater workshop	intergenerational theater workshop	finish scripting design work publicity
15	Committee meetings workshop planning	intergenerational theater workshop	intergenerational theater workshop	design work
23	Committee meetings	Rehearsals	Rehearsals	design work

	rehearsal planning			
29	Committee meetings rehearsal planning	Rehearsals	Rehearsals	set/costume construction
Apr.				
5	rehearsal planning	rehearsals	rehearsals (Spring Break)	publicity
12	rehearsal planning -----	Tech & dress rehearsals perform,	Tech & dress rehearsals April 18, 19	load in tech dress ----- -----
19	Evaluation Final Papers and journals, due April 27	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation

Readings

Burnham, Linda Frye. (1992). Artists Tell History. High Performance, Winter, 1992.

Burnham, Linda Frye. (1994). The Cutting Edge is Enormous. High Performance, Summer, 1994.

Gee, Marie. (1995) Yes in My Front Yard: Community Participation and the Public Art Process. High Performance, Spring/Summer, 1995.

Geer, Richard. (in press) =. Untitled article on *Swamp Gravy* and community performance.

Geer, Richard Owen. (1993). Swamp Gravy. High Performance, Fall, 1993.

Goldbard, Arlene. (1993). Postscript to the Past: Notes Toward a History of Community Arts. High Performance, Fall, 1993.

- Goler, Veta. (1995). Living With the Doors Open: An Interview with Blondell Cummings. High Performance, Spring/Summer 1995.
- Hammer, Kate. (1992). John O'Neal, Actor and Activist: The Praxis of Storytelling. The Drama Review, 36(4), 13-27.
- Kershaw, Baz. (1992). The Politics of Performance: Radical Theater as Cultural Intervention. New York: Routledge.
- Killkelly, Ann. (1993). We're All at the Table In the Working Class Kitchen. High Performance, Winter, 1993.
- Kuftinec, Sonja. (1995). In Search of America in Your Own Backyard: Cornerstone Theater and Transactions of Community. Unpublished manuscript. Stanford University Drama Department.
- Leonard, Bob. (1993). Negotiations: Learning Hard Lessons. High Performance, Winter, 1993.
- Porterfield, Donna. (1993). Arts Presenting and the Celebration of a Community's Culture. High Performance, Winter, 1993.
- Pottenger, Marty. (1997). Making City Water Tunnel #3. High Performance, Spring, 1997.
- Rogoff, Tamar. Writings about the Ivey Project.
- Schechner, Richard. (1988). Performance Theory, revised and expanded edition, New York: Routledge.
- Schechner, Richard. (1991). An Intercultural Primer. American Theater, October, 1991.
- Schwarzman, Mat. (1996). Drawing the Line at Place: The Environmental Justice Project. High Performance, Summer, 1996.
- Simpson, Pearl. (1997). The Black Bottom Picnic. Unpublished manuscript.
- Turner, Victor. (1982). From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play. New York: PAJ.
- Warner, David. (1995). Toys in the Attic. Philadelphia City Paper, March 17-24, 1995.

Yalowitz, William. Community Performance, Historical Fictions, and Intercultural Transactions: *Joshua's Wall* in Mt. Airy, Philadelphia. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Temple University.