The Politics of Performance
ACM Newberry Seminar in the Humanities

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Description
Performance and politics have always been intertwined. For centuries, the stage has offered a unique place to comment upon social issues, reconcile (or not) with historical trauma, and even incite revolution. The very settings of performance – from street corner buskers to smoky jazz bars to opera houses and courtly masques – themselves are fraught with social and political meaning by virtue of their intended audiences and in-/exclusivity. As actors and characters in theatrical presentation, the bodies of performers also prompt us to interrogate socio-political conflicts such as those about women on stage, blackface performances, and colorblind casting. Finally, political "actors" have always trafficked in the trappings of theatre – through
ceremonies, portraiture, and modern mass rallies – as markers of power, just as demonstrations and protests are super-charged by the high theatricality of their tactics.

But how, then, do performers, performances, and audiences make meaning? This seminar will draw from the Newberry’s vibrant collections related to theatre, music, dance, opera, and politics, to explore the fertile ground of political performance and the performance of politics.

Class discussion will explore materials ranging chronologically and geographically, across works by Renaissance English playwrights such as Shakespeare; broadsides, programs, and playbills from the U.K. and U.S.; and promptbooks and acting manuals. We will consider the movement arts by examining treatises and manuals on dance; dance music; festival books; and descriptions of English masques. Our exploration of music will delve into the Newberry’s extensive inventory of opera librettos, sheet music and scores; and concert programs, with a particular emphasis on the history of music and opera in Chicago in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries and its ties to Europe. We will also interrogate explicitly political gestures as represented in the Newberry collections, including speechmaking, conventions, propaganda, and protests; and economic practices like performing arts philanthropy, sponsorship, and marketing.

Our focus on performance broadly conceived, then, invites students to employ a wide range of potential disciplinary perspectives in their research projects. These include the seminar leaders’ research and teaching expertise – in English, history, music, dance, opera, and theatre – and also anthropology, critical race studies, economics, gender and sexuality studies, musicology, political science, and sociology.

In addition to the rich resources at the Newberry Library, this course will take advantage of the robust and diverse performance sites available in Chicago. Early in the semester we will pair our intellectual interrogations within the classroom with three immersive field trips outside of it: to the Chicago Jazz Festival, the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, and the Chicago Lyric Opera. We’ll then reflect on the anthropological and physiological qualities of experiencing live performance versus encountering vestiges of performance in the archives.

Gathering both archival and experiential information, then – in the unique format, venue, and setting of this seminar – allows us the luxury of framing a series of essential questions about the interrelationship of politics and performance: How did performance and politics function in specific historical contexts? How did performance strategies, techniques, and impact vary over time, especially between the early modern and modern periods and within particular political structures? What kinds of information – about text, materials, movement, sound, and audience reception – do we gather in situ during live productions? What elements of performance are preserved in archived materials? In what ways do the differences and overlaps between past and current events shed light upon our processes and analyses? What, ultimately, is the relevance of studying the conception, production, and reception of historical works for contemporary practice?
Course Schedule

UNIT I. DEFINING PERFORMANCE AND ITS PLACE IN THE ARCHIVE
The course opens with an exploration of the term “performance.” Together, we parse the various components that make up a performance, both situating the event (e.g., time period, location, price, audience) and also inventorying those components that comprise the performance (e.g., speech, music, mise-en-scène, applause). We also test the limits of this term and concept, asking what events outside of those traditionally considered within the frames of “art” and “entertainment” might constitute performances.

Common readings will draw short excerpts from:
- E. Patrick Johnson, Appropriating Blackness: Performance and Politics of Authenticity
- José Esteban Muñoz, Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics
- Richard Schechner, Between Theater and Anthropology
- Rebecca Schneider, Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment
- Diana Taylor, The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas

Possible materials from the Newberry Collections:
For the first week, we will examine a few unusual objects and see what we have to say about them! These might include the “bad quarto” of Hamlet, Ben Hecht's Oscar statue, or descriptions of the 1968 Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Chicago, drawn in part from personal papers from reporter Jack Mabley.

UNIT II. TEXT AND SPEECH
What words did people use in performance and when? How did they know what to say? We will explore the role of written archival texts in providing us access to what was spoken on social and theatrical stages. What tools might we use to determine the veracity of written or printed text as reflections of actual speech as performed? How do we determine or value “authenticity” in text and speech? What rhetorical devices do political orators use to communicate and persuade? How have meanings changed over time and in different contexts?

Newberry collection highlights may include:
- American Opera Society of Chicago records
- Covent Garden promptbooks, 1710-1824
- Daniel Dickinson Civil War era oratory
- French Political Pamphlets
- Gus Hall Communist Party Society meeting recordings
- Michael Reid Anti-Fascism collection appeals, calls to action, and declarations
- Margaret Sanger’s Chicago Speaking Engagements in The Little Review
- Lionel Sayers papers, libretto collections
● Seventeenth-century miscellanies, including *The New Academy of Complements* (1671)

**Common readings will draw excerpts from:**

- Nigel Cliff, *The Shakespeare Riots: Revenge, Drama, and Death in Nineteenth-Century America*
- John A. Davis, *The Frightful Stage: Political Censorship of the Theater in Nineteenth-Century Europe*
- Katharine Ellis et al., *Art and Ideology in European Opera*
- Emma Smith, *The Making of Shakespeare’s First Folio*

**Possible performance field trips:**

- American Writers Museum
- Poetry slams

**UNIT III. MATERIAL CULTURE AND PERFORMANCE**

For performance, texts are but the first step in a much more complex web of information. In this unit we consider the material culture associated with performance: its central role in *mise-en-scène* across performance disciplines through sets, props, equipment, and costumes; its importance in transmitting messages of power and grandeur for patrons, sponsors, and institutions; its service in advertising and marketing to audiences; and the rich array of ephemera that last beyond the closing curtain or the final sweep of confetti.

**Newberry collection highlights may include:**

- Chicago Black Lives Matter Protest Collection
- Chicago Opera Theatre Records
- Dill Pickle Club Records
- Ellen Goldsmith Collection
- Jesse Markow Collection
- Materials from Studio Players, The Marionette Player, and other Programs, bulletins, theatre bills, and other printed ephemera from theater activities in Chicago

**Common readings will draw excerpts from:**

- James Garrat, *Music and Politics: A Critical Introduction*
- Ted Gioia, *Music: A Subversive History*
- Victoria Johnson et al., *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*
- Rachel Willie, *Staging the Revolution: Drama, Reinvention and History, 1647–72*

**Possible field trips/performances:**

- Field Museum
- Glessner House
UNIT IV. BODIES IN/AND MOTION
While some performative movements may be captured or at least inferred from staging manuals, performers’ memoires, sketches, or audience testimony, bodily movements in performance are extremely difficult to trace (especially before technological developments could record them). How did people move on stage? Where did they stand? What gestures did they use? What dance steps did they follow? Can we account for stumbles and falls? Despite their profound ephemerality, such elements as on-stage gestures, blocking, individual posture, and even embodied gendered and racial identities carry deeply meaningful political and social messages. More broadly speaking, who has had access, in both past and present, to different forms of performance in any given context? How have socio-economic categories been reinforced or undermined by access (or not) to certain genres? How does the centrality of the body – as performer, as performed, as witnessed – shape our understanding of the politics of performance?

Possible materials from the Newberry collection:
- Ann Barzel Dance Research Collection
- Chicago Business Men’s Orchestra Records
- Reflections on the Hamilton-Burr duel
- Dance for Life Records
- German dance cards in the Wing Ephemera File
- Ellen Goldsmith Papers, including two scarves and a pair of ballet slippers
- Dorothy Hild Papers, Africana Dancers and Edgewater Beach Hotel productions
- Eli Samuel Parker Papers, lecture notes on Indian dances and games
- Photographs of dancers from the Dance MS collection
- Samuel Stanton’s 1790 *The Principles of Duelling*

Common readings will draw excerpts from:
- Naomi André, *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement*
- Seeta Chaganti. *Strange Footing: Poetic Form and Dance in the Late Middle Ages*
- Emily Richmond Pollock, *Dreams of Germany: Musical Imaginaries from the Concert Hall to the Dance Floor*
- Clovis E. Semmes, *The Black Chicago Renaissance*
- Interviews with founders of Chicago dance companies, such as Hubbard Street Dance Chicago’s Lou Conte and Natya Dance Theatre’s Hema Rajagopalan in the online Studs Terkel Radio Archive
- Film clips from the online Chicago Film Archive

Possible Performances/Field Trips:
- Chicago Cultural Center
- Field Museum
- Joffrey Ballet
UNIT V. SOUND

Just as with bodily movement, sound too is a tricky subject to trace in performance before the technological developments of the later nineteenth century. Standard European musical notation in published scores, sheet music, songbooks, manuscripts etc. takes us part of the way toward reconstructing some of the elements of sound in performance. How did the training of American composers with European teachers impact the musical content of performances in the U.S.? Or how might the social, material, or even geographical soundscape of Chicago have influences melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, timbral, orchestration choices of composers? Beyond composed music, the soundscape and acoustic elements of performances – speech patterns, inflection, tone of voice, pacing, diction, breathing, footsteps, muscle pops, grunting, ambient noise, and even silence – are important to tease out as we analyze performative meaning and impact. In what ways does sound, like movement, invite or exclude access and participation among composer, performers, and audience members? Finally, how was music employed alongside other tools to try to create unity of purpose and propaganda in times of national crisis? In the service of social and political resistance?

Newberry collection highlights may include:

- American Sheet Music collections
- Joe Giganti Papers, including audio recording
- Mina Hager Papers, including sound recordings, correspondence, and scores
- Theodore Harrison Papers, including choral conducting and teaching
- Dorothy Hild Papers, sheet music
- Stella Roberts Papers, including pedagogy at American Conservatory of Music following studies with Nadia Boulanger
- Sheet music of World War I from songs such as “Take a Letter to My Daddy ‘Over There’” and “Please Touch My Daddy’s Star Again and Change It Back to Blue”
- Varying printed iterations of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” including its first appearance in a songbook, first printing in a magazine, and others.

Common readings will draw excerpts from:

- James Johnson, Listening in Paris: A Cultural History
- Lawrence Levine, Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America
- William Howland Kenney, Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History, 1904-1930
- John M. Picker, Victorian Soundscapes
- Thomas Turino, Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation

Possible field trips:

- Everybody SING: A Fall Kickoff for Chicago Circle Singing
- World Music Festival Chicago
Unit VI. The Spaces of Performance
How does space – its acoustics, appearance, location, seating, sightlines, history – affect performance? How do spaces suggest who is welcome and who is not? How does the experience of entering a particular space shape audience experience of the meaning of the performance that happens there? How can we know what spaces looked like if they are no longer existent or changed? What is the relationship between political and economic power and the spaces of performance? How have unconventional spaces been co-opted for politicized performance? For performative acts of resistance?

Newberry collection highlights may include:
- Allied Arts Corporation Records
- Arts Club of Chicago Records
- Auditorium Theater Papers
- MoMing Dance and Arts Center Records
- Olivia Monona Papers
- Bertha Ott Papers

Common readings will draw excerpts from:
- Richard Christiansen and Brian Dennehy, A Theater of Our Own: A History and a Memoir of 1,001 Nights in Chicago
- Alistair Fair, Setting the Scene: Perspectives on Twentieth-Century Theatre Architecture
- Dorita Hannah, Event-Space: Theatre Architecture and the Historical Avant-Garde
- Harvey Young and Queen Meccasia Zabriskie, Black Theater Is Black Life: An Oral History of Chicago Theater and Dance, 1970-2010

Possible field trip:
- Lyric Opera of Chicago tour

Unit VII. Stop, Look, and Listen: Reception
What did audiences think or feel during a performance? What expectations did they have? How did they show their reactions? How have evaluations of performances changed between the period in which they were performed and subsequent productions and audiences? What is the role of adaptation in altering audience perceptions in different time periods? How did the rise of print culture and mass media shape the reception of performance? Under conditions of systemic or self-censorship, how do critics embed social and political messages through their coverage of performance?

Newberry collection highlights may include:
- Ayer personal book collection
- Claudia Cassidy Papers
- Fendall collection of pamphlets regarding Adams, Clay, and Jackson debates and speeches
- Frederic Grant Gleason Papers
- Germania Club Scrapbook

Common readings will draw excerpts from:
- Charles Baudelaire, "Richard Wagner and Tannhäuser in Paris"
- Willa Cather, "A Wagner Matinee"
- Jim Johnson, Listening In Paris
- Martin Jay, Downcast Eyes
- James Shapiro, Shakespeare in America