

WHY THEATER?

Instructor: Carey Perloff

Syllabus

In this class we will examine the basic impulses towards creating theater.

WHY DO WE DO IT? FOR WHOM? WITH WHOM? WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THEATRE IN THE CULTURE TODAY? HOW DO WE MEASURE SUCCESS?

WEEK ONE

October 25: WHY REGIONAL THEATER?

Overview: Using Zelda Fichandler's seminal 2003 essay as a jumping off point, we'll explore a little background on the regional theater movement, the beginnings of non-commercial theater, the idea behind company-driven ensemble-based work, the Group Theater, the Living Theater, regional companies, etc.

We'll then focus on A.C.T. specifically: our mission, our values, our artists, our challenges, our goals and hopes for the future. A walk through ACT's season. What does it tell you about us as a theater? Our artists? Our community? Our aspirations? Our philosophy of making theater?

QUESTION TO CONSIDER: For those of you who have a theater company in your hometown, could you articulate what its mission is? Who it considers its audience to be?

WEEK 2

October 29: WHAT DO YOU HAVE FOR FREE?

CASTING and COMPANY. What is the role of the actor in institutional theater? How do/can actors help shape the repertoire? This is an exercise about casting yourselves, by thinking about: "What do you have for free?"

Exercise: create a season for your class. Begin by analyzing your classmates. What does each of you have "for free"; i.e. what is your "type" in the broadest possible sense, and what would be a "stretch" for each of you? The exercise is to cast each of your classmates in two roles: one that is close to what they natively have "for free", and one that is a stretch. The class will discuss the play selections, analyzing not just how "company" dictates repertoire but what the other driving factors might be in determining a season of work. CEP will walk the class through the ACT season planning process, including specific examples of casting with the Core Company in mind.

WEEK 3

November 7: WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?

AUDIENCE. What is the relationship between actor and audience? Between a company and audience? Between an institution and audience? Whom are we hoping to reach when we make theater? How do we find them? In a resident theater such as ACT, how can we/should we be a reflection of the particular community in which we find ourselves? What are the important stories out there that we could capture?

Exercise: think about your own hometown. If you were to be commissioned to write a play reflecting your own town, or to put a season together for your hometown, what would it include? Who are the characters? What form would it take? Where would you put it on (it doesn't have to be in a conventional theater). How would you spread the word? What does theater have to offer to your particular community?

WEEK 4

November 14

FURTHER WORLDS. How can theater take us beyond our own time and place, and connect us to cultures and times beyond ourselves? A discussion of the role of classical theater in contemporary American culture.

WEEK 5

October 13

DEVELOPING NEW WORK. What are the templates? Who should be part of the process? How is audience included? What is useful for writers? What is the actor's role in developing new work?

WEEK 6

October 20

CREATING YOUR OWN THEATER: What does an artistic director do? How do the artistic, financial, communication and fundraising needs come together? How do you learn the skills you need to run your own company?