



Directory | Contact Us | Harvard Kennedy School

SEARCH

HOME | ABOUT US | PROGRAMS | INITIATIVES | FOR STUDENTS | RESEARCH & PUBLICATIONS | NEWS & EVENTS | OPPORTUNITIES



## Initiative in Theater and Human Rights

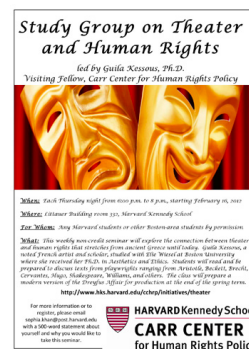
### STUDY GROUP ON THEATER AND HUMAN RIGHTS:

HOME
PEOPLE
STUDY GROUP
NEWS
CALENDAR

The study group - Theater and Human Rights - is a weekly non-credit seminar that will explore the connection between theater and human rights that stretches from ancient Greece until today. It will be led by [Carr Center Fellow Guila Kessous](#), a noted French artist and scholar, who studied with Elie Wiesel at Boston University where she received her Ph.D. in Aesthetics and Ethics. Students will read and be prepared to discuss texts from playwrights ranging from Aristotle, Beckett, Brecht, Cervantes, Hugo, Shakespeare, Williams, and others. The class will prepare a modern version of the Dreyfus Affair for production at the end of the spring term.

The series will be limited to an enrollment of 25 students and will be conducted in a seminar fashion. Students are expected to attend all sessions throughout the semester (twelve) and to come to class having done the readings. Students are expected to participate in discussions.

The theater is an act of solidarity which demands an understanding of "the other's" right in relationship to its own rights. Listening, punctuality, presence and enthusiasm will be required in order to create a dynamic working atmosphere.



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#### When and Where

- Thursday nights 6 to 8 p.m. starting February 16 and continuing throughout the spring semester.
- Due to space limitations, the location for this weekly seminar changes frequently. Please email [Sophia Khan](#) to confirm the location of next meeting .

#### How to Register

- Enrollment/Registration are no longer required now that the seminar is already in progress.
- New participants may join at any time by simply attending any session. Please just email [Sophia Khan](#) first in order to find out where the seminar's next meeting will be held.

Below is a general outline of the study group topics. Specific sessions may be combined as the necessary to accommodate the academic calendar.

**Topic 1: Theater and Human Rights:** Explanation of course and student introductions. Human rights in the theater: what is the right of the actor, the director, the author and the spectator? Which takes precedence? Understanding of the "I," "You" and "He" on the stage: first improvisations on the relationship with the "other." Explanation of the final student performance piece based on a question connected with human rights.

**Topic 2: The Theater as Media:** A theater that addresses human rights is one that discusses fundamental liberties, civil, political and social rights. It is a theater which gives the actor responsibilities. Reflection on the actor's tool: body, voice, mimicry and breathing. Discuss Aristotle's Poetics.

**Topic 3: Theatrical Rights as Human Rights:** Discussion of "pedagogical" theater. Does "catharsis" happen when an audience is shocked at the gods' violation of human rights? Analysis and interpretation of scenes from Sophocles' Oedipus Rex. Examination of theater "for and by the people" from 1789. Analysis and interpretation of scenes from Olympe de Gouge's Black Slavery, or the Happy Shipwreck.

**Topic 4: Theater and Physical Liberty:** Theater and slavery, theater and torture. Analysis and interpretation of scenes from Aimé Césaire's The Tragedy of King Christophe and Jean Métellus's Anacaona. Improvisation of the tragic aspect. The

importance of internalizing the character. How to approach a conflict scene?  
Initiation to techniques developed by Stanislavski, Sanford Meisner and Stella Adler.

**Topic 5: Theater and Private Liberties:** Theater and private life: Analysis of the character of the "Unhappily Married Wife." Molière? Shakespeare? Goldoni? Defender of women's and children's rights? Interpretation of scenes and improvisation of the comedic aspect: satire through laughter.

**Topic 6: Theater and Political and Social Liberties:** "Le Théâtre en liberté," a collection of plays by Victor Hugo, expresses "the wounds of humanity with a consoling idea." Exploration of the Brechtian world: The Jewish Wife by Bertolt Brecht. "Epic" and "Proletarian" theater by Erwin Piscator. Henrik Ibsen, Peer Gynt. "Social" theater by Arnold Wesker: The Kitchen. The more recent example of "Living Theater." Interpretation of scenes and improvisation of the dramatic genre.

**Topic 7: "Humanist" Theater and Catastrophic Theater:** Howard Barker's definitions of theater: catastrophic theater versus a scholarly "humanist" one. Diversity as a right: reflections by Bob Wilson, Peter Brook and Dario Fo. Analysis and interpretation of scenes from Howard Barker's Scenes from an Execution, Endgame by Samuel Beckett, Dario Fo's The Open Couple, The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams and Jean Genet's The Blacks.

**Topic 8: Theater and Genocide:** The difficult "role" of the witness. Introduction to "docu-theater" through the example of Rwanda 94. How does an actor express the suffering of a people? When does an actor's body suffer from a collective existence on stage? Analysis of Antonin Artaud's "theater of cruelty." Interpretation of scenes from Richard Kalinoski's Beast on the Moon which addresses the Armenian genocide and Elie Wiesel's The Trial of Shamgorod which deals with the horrors of the Shoah.

**Topic 9: Concentration Camp Theater:** Plays written and performed in concentration camps under the thumb of an oppressor. Study and interpretation of texts: from Sartre's Bariona to the Terezin camp plays. The Last Cyclist by Karel Svenk. Theater as a "catastrophic" vehicle for human rights? As a means of resistance? Examine the actor's double objective: saying one thing while meaning another. Where is God?

**Topic 10: Theater and Prison:** Theater pieces composed while incarcerated: Cervantès' Les Bagnes d'Alger. What "going on stage" means for actors who have violated human rights? Examples taken from the film by Gilles Blanchard in which 26 prisoners performed Paul Claudel's The Golden Head. Theater of imprisonment: Marat/Sade by Peter Weiss, Haute Surveillance and The Criminal Child by Jean Genet, Bernard-Marie Koltès' Roberto Zucco. Introduction to poetry: The Loving Cloud by Nâzim Hikmet. Study and interpretation of texts: Misterioso-119 by Koffi Kwahulé.

**Topic 11: Drama as Therapy?** Discussion of theater as therapy, introduction to techniques used in the "Theater of the Oppressed" by Augusto Boal. The techniques used in Image Theater, Invisible Theater, and Rainbow of Desire in order to create an interactive theater. A "Forum Theater" allowing everyone to express their own solutions onstage so as to provide multiple hypotheses for situations where human rights are lacking; ultimately making the spectator become a 'spect-actor.' Analysis of Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed and Stephan Karpman's The Drama Triangle.

**Topic 12: Conclusion and Wrap-Up:** Discussion about theater giving responsibility to the author, actor, director and audience. The entire theatrical process is connected to human rights and modernity. The emergence of the third generation's human rights agenda: environmental rights. Study and interpretation of text: Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall Down by Martha Boesing. Presentation of students' personal "projects": a final performance of a scene based on an issue connected to human rights.