

CALL FOR PROPOSALS 1: PERFORMING ABSENCE

American Theatre & Drama Society Panel

at the American Literature Association

29th Annual Conference • May 24-27, 2018 • San Francisco

The American Theatre & Drama Society is dedicated to the study of theatre and drama in and of the Americas, its varied histories, traditions, literatures, identities, and performances within its cultural contexts. In furtherance of this goal, ATDS solicits presentations for the American Literature Association Annual Conference that address the role, power, and impact of silence, stillness, and absence in performance. In the 1990s, the organization once called Students Against Drunk Driving designed a high school-based activity wherein a “Grim Reaper” designates students to be “killed” by a drunk driver. The “dead” paint their faces white and remain silent for the rest of the day, drawing critical attention to the issue of impaired driving, marking their presence by their absence.

Over the past year, protesters have poured into city streets, congressional hallways, and town hall meetings to make their voices heard and their bodies seen on issues of health care and gender equity, among others. Motion and volume are often the stuff of progress. In *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910*, Daphne A. Brooks posits that successfully defiant bodies effectively “cut through the tyranny of stillness evolving out of the Atlantic world’s dominant racial and gender narratives” (7). But when and where is there power in stillness? When and where is there progress in silence? When and where are “Grim Reapers” at work?

We invite 3-4 proposals that consider traditional, unconventional, and popular American performances in which dramatic action and impact rely on immobility and quiet. ATDS recognizes that notions of America encompass migrations of peoples and cultures that overlap and influence one another. Proposals may consider:

- Silence and stillness as political protest (Civil Rights-era sit-ins, HIV/AIDS die-ins, Standing Rock demonstrations, etc.)
- The influence and/or appropriation of non-Western performance forms and bodies (Bread & Puppet and nōh, Coco Fusco’s *The Couple in the Cage*, etc.)
- Contemporary playwrights who reconceive the stuff of action (Annie Baker’s *Circle Mirror Transformation*, Will Eno’s *THOM PAIN: based on nothing*, etc.)
- The functions and effects of staring and the gaze in disability, queer, and gender studies
- The effects of immobility or silence on bodies in performance
- Spectator expectations and/or experiences of stillness

Please send a 250-word abstract (for a 15-minute presentation) to Matt DiCintio, session chair, at matt.dicintio@gmail.com by **December 15**. Panelists will be notified by January 15. Selected panelists are expected to be or become ATDS members.

CALL FOR PROPOSALS 2: PERFORMERS AS THINKERS

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In 1945, Eric Bentley wrote in his foreword to *The Playwright as Thinker*: “The pressure of commercial theater may also become a tyranny. In that event the artist can know but one relationship to it: the relationship of antagonism. In such an era the playwright is either a rebel and an artist or a yes man and a hack. I am afraid that the present is such an era.” In drawing a distinction between American plays written and produced between 1910-1940 and works by Ibsen, Shaw, Strindberg, and Brecht, Bentley claimed America needed playwrights as thinkers (and bullishly added we had none). The American Theatre & Drama Society begs to differ with Bentley’s premise, if not his time period, and we solicit presentations for the American Literature Association Annual Conference that consider late 20th- and 21st-century playwrights as thinkers.

The American Theatre & Drama Society is dedicated to the study of theatre and drama in and of the Americas, its varied histories, traditions, literatures, identities, and performances within its cultural contexts. With this goal in mind, we invite presenters to consider the contributions made by playwrights to social, intellectual, political, and cultural movements that extend beyond the doors of the theatre. What are American playwrights thinking about? What are American playwrights asking us/inviting us/forcing us to think about? In 2002, Jaan Whitehead wrote in her memorable and controversial essay, “Art Will Out,” “Power means *who* asks *what* questions of whom – who frames the questions and who answers them?” What questions do playwrights and performers ask, and what power does it give them?

We invite 3-4 proposals that consider traditional, unconventional, and popular American performances that feature playwrights and performance-makers as thinkers and thought-leaders. ATDS recognizes that notions of America encompass migrations of peoples and cultures that overlap and influence one another. Proposals may consider:

- The role of the playwright/performer as public intellectual
- Theatre and drama with an agenda/as propaganda/as political protest
- Theatre and drama as laboratories for inquiry
- Philosophies of performance/performances of philosophy
- The entrance of “high brow” entertainments into popular culture (and vice versa)
- Blocs of playwrights (13P, Workhaus Collective, etc.)

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