

Theatrical and Affective (Re-)Appropriations of Archiving in US Drama and Performance

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Archival objects and records are instrumental in how contemporary American drama and performance practices envision theater as a site of social and historical contestation. In contemporary African American drama, for instance, Black female playwright Lynn Nottage's *One More River To Cross: A Verbatim Fugue* (2015) uses first-person accounts of slavery drawn from the WPA Writers' Project to confront the legacy of slavery and to position theater as an archival site of cultural remembrance. Rather than employing the archival document as a claim to historical facticity, a wide range of archival and archiving practices on the stage — such as reenactments of historical material, onstage citations of trial records, personal diaries, testimonies and oral history interviews, historical photographs or video recordings — conceptualize new aesthetic, material, and affective modes of cultural remembrance and political participation.

Theater and performance artists in the US widely confront the archives' involvement in regimes of power as well as seek to (re)claim the archive as an inventory of disappeared and unaccounted for experiences and traditions. Contemporary drama and performance raise critical questions of theater's relation and responsibility to the archive in national and transnational contexts (Hamilton et al. 2002; Dossett 2020). In contrast to conventional approaches to the ontology of performance and archival materials, this panel takes conceptual cues from Rebecca Schneider's influential idea "performance remains," which foregrounds the praxeological aspects of performing the archive and archiving performance. Schneider destabilizes the traditional distinction between archive and performance by defining performance as "both the *act* of remaining and a means of re-appearance and 'reparticipation'" (Schneider 101, emphasis original). Following Schneider's definition, this panel explores the creative appropriations of the archive in theatrical performance and theater as a site for inventing archival practices that shape collective and participatory forms of history and memory.

In this light we examine the following questions: What are the aesthetic and affective affordances of re-appropriating archival documents in live performance? How do practices of theatrical archiving negotiate experiences of displacement and omission along the lines of race, gender, and queerness? And how do these relate to contemporary discussions in memory studies, decolonial theory, and black and queer studies? This panel invites interdisciplinary perspectives on aspects of archival scholarship in drama and performance studies, historiography and the dramatic tradition, performance history, (cultural) performance studies, or dramatic theory and theater history.

We invite papers of about 20 minutes related but not limited to the following topics:

- (re)conceptualizations of historical archives in theatrical performance
- theater's participation in cultural archiving practices
- the oppositional, commemorative, or participatory potentials of theater as a mode of archiving

- theatrical re-appropriations of archival objects and documents
- archiving as an aesthetic practice and affective mode in theater and performance
- the ethical and political implications of staging archival materials such as slave testimonies or personal diaries
- the politics of embodiment and collective representations of the body as an archive
- case studies of archival practices in African American, Asian American, Native American, Latinx, Queer, or Feminist theatrical traditions (theory, history, aesthetics)

Confirmed Speaker

- Professor Kate Dossett (University of Leeds)

References

Dossett, Kate. *Radical Black Theatre in the New Deal*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. Print.

Hamilton, Carolyn et al. *Refiguring the Archive*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002. Print.

Schneider, Rebecca. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.