Being Political

This panel will take up the question of ‘being’ as a contingent political state, or a state under constant interrogation in works of theatre and drama concerned with questions of politics. The panel will examine how Western theatre, in spite of its critics, still provokes immediacy, and afterthoughts, in relation to conflicting and contradictory regimes and conditions of power and knowledge.

The panel invites responses from other contributors but is comprised at the moment of three speakers who will each give papers as follows.

If there is sufficient interest in this topic, it could be convened so that the papers were followed by a more open session or panel discussion with debate from the floor.

The speakers will discuss selected theatre works as well as present distinctive theoretical frameworks for considering how ‘being political’ functions in nation-states of the contemporary era.

Professor Helen Gilbert (Royal Holloway) on Canadian and Australian responses to the ‘war on terror’. The aim is to analyse the techniques and strategies currently animating political theatre about U.S. foreign policy and to suggest some of the effects of such policy in specific locales. The discussion will be informed by Hardt and Negri’s recent work on globalisation, terrorism and “the multitude.”

Dr Denise Varney (University of Melbourne) on German playwright Anna Langhoff's *The Table Laid*. This play represents post-nationalist pressures in reunified Germany as asylum seekers from the former Soviet bloc fight it out over cooking practices in a refugee camp. The issue becomes critical when their social worker is raped and murdered by one of them. It examines the limits of the state and current ideology to deal with complex social and ethnic problems at this juncture.

Professor Rachel Fensham (Surrey) on the US alliance, tentatively titled ‘The Blue Dress, Mr President and Being Miss Julie.’ This paper will read the Bogart production of *Miss Julie* against the paradox of Clinton's impeachment, as a commentary on class, race and justice in contemporary America.

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