Established in 1996, the Institute for the Study of Culture & Society (ICS) is a public humanities hub at Bowling Green State University.

Our aim is to encourage innovation in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, and to communicate the value and significance of that work to the wider public.
About Angela Ahlgren

Associate Professor of Theater and Film

- PhD Performance as Public Practice, University of Texas at Austin
- Teaches Theater History and Performance Studies in the department of Theatre and Film.
- Serves as Graduate Coordinator for the MA and PhD programs.
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Places, Please: Stage Managers, Gender, and Invisible Labor

Angela K. Ahlgren
Theatre & Film, akahlgr@bgsu.edu

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Thank You

- Jolie Sheffer, ICS Director
- Joe Elia and Stanley Owusu, ICS interns
- Heath Diehl and the Black Swamp Players
- The Department of Theatre and Film
- Dan Cullen and David Loehr, transcription
- The stage managers I interviewed
Stage Management Experience
Labor Activism in Theatre
Gender Roles in Stage Management
Interviews

- People of any gender who work or have worked as a stage manager
- 60-120 minutes for each interview (90 min is average)
- Structured interviews (same questions for everyone)
- Oral History-style, ask participants to narrate and describe their work
Aims of the Project

- Understand Stage Management Labor
- Understand Gendered Dimensions of Theatre Labor
- Disrupt Theater Mythology/Norms
- Seek Material Changes to SM Role
"The stage manager, despite the extent of his duties and responsibilities, is a figure in the theatre who is practically unsung. (He must not be confused with the stage director, who directs rehearsals and is finished with the production once it is running smoothly.) The work of the stage manager is a labor of infinite detail. It begins with the calling of the company for the first rehearsal, and it continues so long as the play continues, and even afterward. Much depends upon it, but for all this the stage manager is not a high-salaried man. Generally he receives little more than the actor playing a small part. "A conscientious stage manager is always the first man at rehearsals and the last to leave. He is in the nature of a secretary to the director in these early days. He has charge of the manuscripts and the typewritten parts, and is responsible in the event of their loss—and it might be added that they are invariably being lost. One of his earliest duties is to note the names and addresses of the members of the cast, for he is likely to be called upon to round them up on an instant's notice. At rehearsals, among other things, he keeps the players from strolling out of the theatre between their scenes—the propensity of actors for eluding the eye at rehearsals is wondrously developed—and he keeps the manuscript always open before him for the purpose of noting such changes of dialogue, and such stage business, as the director or author may make. Should the director inform a player that he sits, crosses, or otherwise disports himself at a certain line, it is the duty of the stage manager to note the direction in the proper place in the script. Frequently
"No matter what mistakes are made, I feel personally responsible."

Ruth Mitchell (1919-2000)
Organizational and Aesthetic Labor

• “More than just a stopwatch” (Lisa S.)
Lyndsey G.

• “The hub of the wheel”

• “I don’t work for you. I work for the show”
Joyce D.

• “You have to be a chameleon”

• “I really do see the stage manager as a unifying force”
Victoria R.

- “professional problem-solver”

- “a big part of being a stage manager is being ‘Team Show’”
Phoenix J.

- “process management role”
- “a guiding and facilitating force”
• “a stage manager of the story”
What are the benefits and drawbacks of invisible labor?
Victoria R.

• “I think being invisible to the audience is awesome!”

• Being invisible “in rehearsal and tech is crap.”
“A stage manager is never going to sell a ticket, right?”

“If you’re not gonna take it for minimum, I can find somebody else who will.”
Elizabeth M.

• “It’s an invisible art.”

• “Well, how do you expect it all happens every night, timed perfectly? I don’t get that credit from people.”
“This labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others--in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place. This kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality.” ~ Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart* (1983)
“Everybody likes a lady who has a lot of good ideas but doesn’t need to be in charge.”

“I think that, for me, as a woman, personality management is built in.”
“there is an emotional labor put onto stage management that is complicated.”
Lisa S.

- “guilt and disappointment”

- “We are not a family”

- “truly a grown-ass man in his sixties who wouldn’t regard me as a human being”
Small Changes

- Plan for SM understudies
- Have an on-call SM list
- Change “first to arrive, last to leave” culture
- Pay SMs for production meetings and paperwork
Key References


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If you enjoyed tonight's conversation, check out the BG Ideas podcast! In each episode, Dr. Jolie Sheffer talks with academics, artists, activists, and other professionals about their work for the public good.

Learn more about the amazing interdisciplinary work being done in and around BGSU to help address big social problems! Listen via your favorite podcasting platform.
Upcoming Events in Spring 2023

Dr. Ryan Ebright, “Making American Opera After Einstein”
Thursday, March 2, 7 pm at Way Public Library, 101 E. Indiana Ave., Perrysburg.

Dr. Francio Guadeloupe, “The Politics of Race in Europe and the Caribbean”
Monday, April 17, 6 pm in the Pallister Room, Jerome Library, BGSU Main Campus.