Centre for Cultures, Texts and Creative Industries Seminar:

Genet’s ‘rituals of the oppressed and the main stage: Benedict Andrews’s *The Maids* at Sydney Theatre Company

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In 2013 Benedict Andrews directed Jean Genet’s *The Maids* at the Sydney Theatre Company. Cate Blanchett (in the role of Claire) and Isabelle Huppert (as Solange) played the maids Genet originally intended to be acted by male performers, and Elizabeth Debicki as Madame performed the object of the maids’ ritual simulation of murder. Genet’s play, a fictionalisation of Christine and Léa Papin’s brutal slaughter of their mistresses in 1933, heightens the experience of theatrical modes of perception in its insistence on role-playing against a backdrop of social stratification. Andrews’s production of Genet’s play exemplifies theatre central to highly charged, polemic public debate concerning the prevalence of adaptation in Australia. According to Andrews the process of translating a text for the stage constitutes interpretation and subsequently a political act. But what, if any, political function does this performance of Genet’s drama have in the context of main stage theatre in Australia and beyond? Is it simply an example of star marketing that fails to correspond to contemporary notions of critical art? What issues are at play for the audiences that see this production? In considering these questions this paper will examine Peter Boenisch’s (2015) theorisation of *Regie* (directing) as a process of ‘making sense’ rather than consumption and the implications of this conceptualisation for adaptation as an aesthetico-political strategy; celebrity spectacle; and, the question of the commodification of theatre as a cultural form.

**THURSDAY 24 NOVEMBER. 12.30-1.30PM.**
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