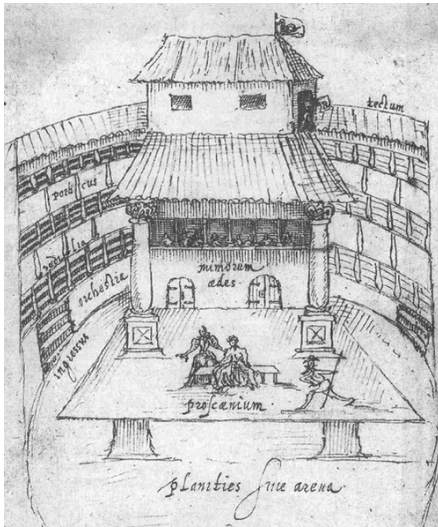


The Renaissance Studies Program
“Political Renaissance” Lecture Series
presents the first lecture by

WILLIAM WEST

*“All for your delight we are not here”:
The Impolitics of Elizabethan Theaters*

4:00 p.m., Friday, February 5, 2010
Maple Room
Indiana Memorial Union



The producers of Elizabethan playing insist repeatedly that theaters bring together the unlike and the unlikely: in playhouses, a motley “gallimaufrey” of social classes, professions, ages, preferences, capacities, and genders (Lyly, *Midas*, 1589) behold “nothing but confusion and errors” (a 1594 performance of Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors*). The discomfort as well as the exhilaration that accompanied the first commercial Elizabethan public performances is clear from contemporary responses to them, scanty though they are. The baffling noises, gestures, and wordplay of performance seem to have evoked some real uncertainties. What little we do know of responses hints that early audiences experimented with radically new strategies for making sense of performance, often very different from our own.

Their confusions also hint at something to be gained from the playhouses’ blurring of boundaries: a possibility of reorganizing mental categories, of remaking the old into the new, of representing the present and even of making a new mark in it. What the playhouses did not do, though, was promote any easily detectable sense of political potential in their producers, whether playmakers or playgoers. If they were circulating social energy, Elizabethan theaters seem to have done it pretty aimlessly. In the light of two contrasting readings of the politics of theaters, the ancient Greek theater of the polis and the twentieth century performance of presence and absence, I will ask whether this absence of evidence in fact outlines a differing possibility for the sharing of experience.

William West is an Associate Professor of English, Classics
and Comparative Literary Studies at Northwestern University

This lecture is made possible through the generous support of the College Arts and Humanities Institute, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Office of the Provost, the Department of English. Refreshments to follow the lecture.