

Queer Theatre
THR367/ENG385
Bobst Hall 105
Spring 2009
Prof. Jill Dolan
Tuesday/Thursday, 1:30 – 2:50
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Office hours by appointment

Course Description:

This course will combine textual analysis of plays and performance art with a consideration of queer performance practice and production. We will pose a number of questions to the plays we read and see, which will include the following: How does the play's/performance's structure and form help to deliver its content? What kind of spectator is assumed to make the text "fully" intelligible? Is full understanding ever truly possible, with any text, by all spectators? Why do some plays "succeed" and others don't? What is it about specific production contexts and modes of production (meaning the way performance practices intersect with economic, social, geographical, and political issues) that facilitate "success" on what terms? What is it that makes certain kinds of queer theatre—by Terrence McNally, Tim Miller, Craig Lucas, and other mostly male queer performers/playwrights, although Paula Vogel could in some ways be included here—"successful" according to conventional terms? What keeps other kinds of queer performance "subcultural" or "marginal" to some presumptive dominant? Is it possible to sustain subcultures in a moment in which capitalism saturates our lives?

The other set of questions we'll address will look at the intersecting vectors of gender/sexuality/race and other complex identity categories, for their implications as overlays on a text's form, structure, content, and address. How salient is identity in which production contexts? Can we assume that the identity of the playwright is a sufficient (or even partial) lens through which to ask questions about form, structure, content, address, and modes of production? We'll consider our own spectatorial and readerly identities to be fluid, to help us better pose questions about how identity frames the creation and reception of a performance/play text.

Likewise, the current moment offers a relatively great deal of visibility for gay and lesbian subjects in performance, the media, film, television, and other forms of representation. Recent political issues—gays in the military, gay marriage, debates over adoption for gay families, and citizenship for queer internationals—have brought attention to issues and ideas once considered far off the radar of heteronormative culture. How does queer performance take up these issues and what can queer theory tell us about how to "read" and act on them? How can theory be a tool not only for performance, but for activism? How can this current visibility be pressed into the service of a more radical queer political program than the right to marry? Or is visibility itself a kind of trap that precludes an "outlaw" stance?

Finally, we'll look at how emotion works in our response to plays (on the page and on the stage), looking at "feeling" as a method of passionate engagement with culture, politics, and life as read through expressive culture.

By the end of this class you should have:

- Familiarized yourself with the wealth of contents and forms of what might be called “gay,” “lesbian,” “queer,” “trans,” “bi,” or other forms of sexuality-oriented theatre and performance
- Learned what it means to be a spectator of any kind of performance or representation through a “queer” perspective, regardless of your own identity
- Acquired analytical tools that allow you to put a play in its past, present, and future cultural contexts, to determine what it might mean for whom, where, and its potential to make an activist statement according to various definitions

Course Outline:

Week One: Queer Theatre: History of a Movement and an Idea

Tuesday, 2/3

- Intro: my work; your work.
- What is queer? DVD clips and discussion.

Thursday, 2/5 (~63)

- Jill Dolan, “Lesbian and Gay Drama,” in David Krasner, ed., *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 486-503 (17) e-reserve
- “From the Invisible to the Ridiculous: The Emergence of an Out Theatre Aesthetic,” in Alisa Solomon and Framji Minwalla, eds., *The Queerest Art: Essays on Lesbian and Gay Theatre* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 135-151 (16) e-reserve
- “Out Across America: Playing from P.S. 122 to Peoria,” in *The Queerest Art*, 168-182 (30) e-reserve

Week Two: Cultural and Historical Context

Tuesday, 2/10

- Selections from Wendell Stone, *Caffe Cino* e-reserve
- Selections from Steve Bottoms, *Playing Underground* e-reserve

Thursday, 2/12 (~43)

- Dolan, “Carmelita Tropicana Chats at the Club Chandelier,” in *The Drama Review: Thirty Years of Commentary on the Avant-Garde*, 315-319 (4) e-reserve
- Alisa Solomon, “The WOW Café,” in *The Drama Review: Thirty Years of Commentary on the Avant-Garde*, 305-314 (19) e-reserve
- Kate Davy, WOW Café as production context (unpublished ms., 1-20). PDF attachment

- **For research:** Highways Performance (LA); Theatre Rhinoceros (SF); Josey's Juice Joint (SF); Alice B. (Seattle); Lanford Wilson; Doric Wilson; Robert Chesley; Joe Cino.

Week Three: Early Plays and Playwrights

Tuesday, 2/17

JD out; workshop journals and projects.

Thursday, 2/19

- Martin Crowley, *Boys in the Band* reserve
 - Jane Chambers, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* reserve
 - Clips: *Boys in the Band* (film version)
- **For research:** Ana Marie Simo; Medusa's Revenge; It's Alright to be a Woman Theatre; Robert Chesley, *Jerkers*; Chambers, *A Late Snow*; *The Killing of Sister George*; William Hoffman, *As Is*.

Week Four: Queers Off Broadway

Tuesday, 2/24 (~35+play)

- Paula Vogel, *How I Learned to Drive*, in Paula Vogel, *The Mammary Plays* (New York: TCG, 1998), 3-92 e-reserves
- David Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism: Recontextualizing American Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), "Paula Vogel as Male Impersonator," 187-204 (17), e-reserves
- Ann Pellegrini, "Staging Sexual Injury: *How I Learned to Drive*," in Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach, eds., *Critical Theory and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2nd edition, 2007), 413-431 (18) e-reserve

Thursday, 2/26 (~24+play)

- Moisés Kaufman, *The Laramie Project*
 - Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), "The Laramie Project," 113-137 (24) e-reserve
 - Clips: *Laramie Project* (HBO film); *The Matthew Shepard Story* (tv film)
- **For research:** *The Normal Heart*; *M. Butterfly*; *Lips Together, Teeth Apart*.

Week Five: Reading Queerly

Tuesday, 3/3 (~54+play)

- Dolan, "Queer Theatre: Theorizing a Theatrical Vernacular," in *Geographies of Learning*, 92-116 (24), e-reserve
- Wolf, "Sound of Music," in *A Problem Like Maria*, 203-233 (30), e-reserve

- Holly Hughes, *The Well of Horniness* in Don Shewey, ed. *Out Front: Contemporary Gay and Lesbian Plays* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 221-252, (31) e-reserve
- **For research:** Richard Dyer; Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer*

Thursday, 3/5

- **JD out; workshop journals and projects.**
- **Arrange to see Streetcar Named Desire, Berlind Theatre this weekend**

Week Six: Collective/Collaborative Performance

Tuesday, 3/10 (~68+play)

- Tennessee Williams, *Streetcar Named Desire* [**rec.**] reserve
- Shaw/Weaver/Bloodlips, *Belle Reprieve*, in Sue-Ellen Case, ed., *Split Britches: Lesbian Practice, Feminist Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 149-183 (34) e-reserve
- Intro to Sue-Ellen Case, ed., *Split Britches*, 1-34 (34) e-reserve

Thursday, 3/12 (~20+ play + article)

- Pomo Afro Homos, *Dark Fruit*, in ed. John Clum, *Staging Gay Lives: An Anthology of Contemporary Gay Theatre* (Westview Press, 1996), 319-339 (20) e-reserve
- Five Lesbian Brothers, *The Secretaries*, in *The Five Lesbian Brothers: Four Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2000), e-reserve
- Sara Warner, "Rage Slaves: The Commodification of Affect in the Five Lesbian Brothers' *The Secretaries*," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 13 (Fall 2008), e-reserve
- **For research:** *Quinceanera*, created by Alberto Antonio Araiza, Paul Bonin-Rodriguez, Michael Marinez, and Danny Bolero Zaldivar, *The Color of Theatre*, 261-301; Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, "Quinceanera: A Latino Queer and Transcultural Party for AIDS," 303-312; both in Uno and Burns, *The Color of Theatre*.

Week Seven: Spring Break

Week Eight: Autobiographical Testimonies

Tuesday, 3/24 (~43)

- **Tim Miller visit to class**
- Tim Miller, *My Queer Body*, in *Body Blows: Six Performances* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 79-122 (43) e-reserve

Thursday, 3/26 (~17+ selections)

- Selections from Robin Bernstein, ed. *Cast Out: Queer Lives in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), [e-reserve](#)
 - “When We Were Warriors,” Brian Freeman, in Alisa Solomon and Framji Minwalla, eds. *The Queerest Art: Essays on Lesbian and Gay Theatre* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 247-253 (7) [e-reserve](#)
 - “Goodnight Irene,” Carmelita Tropicana, in *The Queerest Art*, 261-265 (10) [e-reserve](#)
- **For research:** Holly Hughes, *World Without End*; Peggy Shaw, *Menopausal Gentleman*; E. Patrick Johnson, black and gay in the south; Marga Gomez; Margaret Cho.

Week Nine: Musicals and Music

Tuesday, 3/31 (~20)

- Stacy Wolf, “‘Defying Gravity’: Queer Conventions in the Musical *Wicked*,” *Theatre Journal* 60.1 (March 2008): 1-21 (20).
- Clips: “Popular,” from *Wicked*
- ***Ann Pellegrini lecture, 4:30 today***

Thursday, 4/2 (~18)

- James Wilson, “‘Ladies and Gentlemen, People Die’: The Uncomfortable Performances of Kiki and Herb,” in James Fisher, ed., “*We Will be Citizens*”: *New Essays on Gay and Lesbian Theatre* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 194-212 (18) [e-reserve](#)
 - Clips: Kiki and Herb
 - ***Performances of Angels in America begin***
- **For research:** Tim Miller, *Us* (performance on musical theatre); *Spring Awakening*; *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*; *Avenue Q*; *Drowsy Chaperone*; *La Cage Aux Folles*; *Rent*.

Week Ten: The Case of Kushner

Tuesday, 4/7 (~22+play)

- *Angels, Part One*
- David Román, “November 1, 1002”: AIDS/*Angels in America*,” in *Acts of Intervention* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1998), 202-224 (22) [e-reserve](#)
- DVD clips, HBO film production of *Angels*

Thursday, 4/9

- *Angels, Part Two*

- David Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism: Recontextualizing American Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), chapter on *Angels in America*, e-reserve
- DVD clips, HBO film production of *Angels*
- **For research:** Kushner, *Slavs!*; *Homebody*, *Kabul*; *Munich* (film); *Bright Room Called Day*; additional critical material on Kushner, *Angels*, or HIV/AIDS.

Week Eleven: Slam, Spoken-Word, and Language Performance

Tuesday, 4/14

- ***Dynasty Handbag (Jibz Cameron) class visit***
- Dolan, “Dynasty Handbag,” The Feminist Spectator Blog.” www.feministspectator.blogspot.com

Thursday, 4/16 (~23+)

- ***Stacey Ann Chin class visit***
- Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), “Def Poetry Jam,” 89-112 (23) e-reserve
- Selections, *Def Poetry Jam*, e-reserve
- ***See Stacey Ann Chin, April 17th***
- **For research:** Alix Olsen (spoken word); drag kings (see Judith Halberstam, “Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance,” in *Female Masculinities* [231-266]).

Week Twelve: Mainstreaming?

Tuesday, 4/21 (~16+ 2 plays)

- Lisa Kron, *2.5 Minute Ride* (New York: TCG, 2000). (*purchase/reserve*)
- Lisa Kron, *Well* (New York: TCG, 2006). (*purchase/reserve*)
- Leslie Atkins Durham, “Lisa Kron: Facing and Placing Lesbian Identity on New York Stages,” in Fisher, “*We Will be Citizens*”: *New Essays on Gay and Lesbian Theatre* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 141-157 (16), e-reserve
- Audio: *2.5 Minute Ride*

Thursday, 4/23 (~24+ 2 plays)

- Terrence McNally, *Love! Valor! Compassion!* (*purchase/reserve*)
- Richard Greenberg, *Take Me Out* (*purchase/reserve*)
- James Fisher, “From Tolerance to Liberation: Gay Drama in the Mainstream . . .” in James Fisher, ed., “*We Will be Citizens*”: *New Essays on Gay and Lesbian Theatre* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 7-31 (24) e-reserve
- ***Brother/Sister Plays open (previews) 4/24; open 5/1; pride night 5/7; runs April 24 – June 21. Brother/Sister Plays II, May 14 – June 21. Please see the production by 4/28 for class discussion.***

- **For research:** *The Captive*; Mae West's plays; *Chorus Line*; *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*.

Week Thirteen

Tuesday, 4/28

- Possible Terrell McRaney visit
- Brian Freeman, *Civil Sex*, in Harry Elam and Robert Alexander, eds., *The Fire This Time: African American Plays for the 21st Century, Vol. 1*
- Luis Alfaro
- Discuss *Brother/Sister Plays* performance
- Loose ends

Thursday, April 30:

- Culmination, presentations, wrap-up

Reading period, May 4 – 12

Dean's Date, May 12: Papers due (no incompletes or extensions will be given)

Assignments:

1. Critical Journals, no more than one single-spaced page for every week but #1, etc. [fill in]. Means 12 total, to be turned in four times through the semester. During the weeks we read articles, your journal should focus on isolating and engaging one element of one of the essays we're reading. You should pull quotes from the material with which to engage closely (see handout). During the weeks we're reading plays, your journal should be a formal/structural analysis of the play through your own critical methodology. 20% of grade.
2. Two short reports on one of the "research" suggestions included after every class meeting. This requires digging out critical, production, or biographical material on the topic in question; writing up a report; and presenting it (not reading it, but presenting it, in no more than five minutes) to the class on the day marked in the syllabus. You can consult with me about these topics, and potentially choose different ones. 20% of grade.
3. Contextual analysis: A short research project that will require you to gather information about the day's playwright and the play's production history. You'll choose two of the playwrights/plays for this semester, conduct your research, and then prepare an oral report no longer than five minutes to be delivered at the top of the class meeting in which we discuss that play/playwright. You'll hand in notes to me and to colleagues in class, so that we'll all compile historiographic and biographic information on the play. 20% of grade.

4. Final project, due last day of class. Choose one of the following options (40% of grade):
 - a. A “pitch” for one of the plays we’ve read in class, written to a specific regional theatre, which outlines why that particular theatre should produce this particular play. Describe the intended readership/audience and offer an argument about how the play works ideologically, aesthetically, and culturally, especially for an audience at that theatre. 10 pages double-spaced.
 - b. A “pitch” for a play we haven’t read in class, following the sociological, performance, and literary analytical methods we’ve practiced this semester, written to a specific regional theatre, which outlines why that particular theatre should produce this particular play. Describe the intended readership/audience and offer an argument about how the play works ideologically, aesthetically, and culturally, especially for an audience at that theatre. 10 pages double-spaced.
 - c. A research paper on a specific performance venue, using several performance examples to argue how it creates certain production opportunities and a variety of community, political, and aesthetic meanings. 10 pages double-spaced.
 - d. Comparative analysis of the form/structure and production history/context of two different plays/productions, which we have or haven’t read this semester or two different performance venues, analyzing their location, audiences, and funding structures. 10 pages double-spaced.
 - e. A discussion of a playwright we either have or haven’t read in class, studying two of his or her plays through a culturally situated performance/literary analysis.
 - f. A performance project that presents a scene from one of the plays we’ve read this semester, with a theorized production concept articulated in a three page double-spaced paper. These performances will be presented at the end of the semester.
 - g. Some combination of the above suggestions, which you can negotiate with me individually. I’d like the final project to be useful to each of you, in ways I’m sure will be idiosyncratic.
5. Class participation and presentation of your final project. I’ll expect you to read course materials closely, and come to class prepared to raise questions, make observations, and participate actively in our discussions. This course is a seminar, not a lecture; the quality of our discussions will depend on your commitment to engaging the material actively. The presentation of your final project will be informal, but should be a coherent summary of your work, with insightful comments and questions to pose to your colleagues. Although participation and your presentation won’t be counted as a percentage in the grading rubric, it will absolutely color how I see your work in this class. I’ll check in with you several

times during the semester about how your participation is coming along, so that my impressions won't be a surprise to you and we can work to correct any deficiencies early on.

Doing well in this class:

1. Come to class on time each day; don't be absent.
2. Turn your work in on time. Make sure your writing is clear, spelled properly, carefully punctuated, well structured, and beautifully presented.
3. Don't ask for extensions on your work or expect more time to complete the course requirements. I don't give incompletes. Involvement in theatre production is not an extenuating circumstance.
4. Come see me during office hours to talk about your work. I'm always available to make appointments for meetings.
5. Email me with any questions you might have about the course material or your assignments.