

ENGL 852
Studies in Gender, Sexuality and Literature
Fall 2016

Queer Performance in Canada Now

Instructor:

Peter Dickinson (English and Contemporary Arts; peter_dickinson@sfu.ca)

Office Hours: Mondays, 3-4 pm, AQ 6117; or by appointment

Course Meeting Time:

Mondays, 4:30-7:20 pm, AQ 6093, SFU Burnaby

Course Description:

With queer-themed plays and performances a fixture on stages across the country, what do we mean when we talk about “queer performance in Canada now?” How might we sum up the state of the field: where we have been; where we are today; and where we are going? This seminar, building on the energy generated by a major conference on this subject held at SFU’s Goldcorp Centre for the Arts in July 2016 (see <http://q2qconference.com>), will attempt to answer these and related questions through an examination of a selection of plays, performances, multimedia installations, dances, operas, and works of body art—most created and produced within the past five years. The starting point for our conversations will be an interrogation of the very terms that make up our seminar title. In our post-(post?)identity politics 21st century, what aesthetic and political traction is to be gained—if any—in retaining the label “queer” to describe contemporary performance practice made under the LGBTTTQ banner? In a country as regionally, linguistically, and culturally diverse as Canada, can one even adequately account for all of the material produced under such a label? And in a performance landscape increasingly crowded with ever more queer idioms (burlesque, cabaret, stand-up, spoken word, new media art, the new drag), does the gay- or lesbian-themed play seem impossibly quaint? In short, where is here now? And is here still queer?

Primary Texts:

2boys.tv, *Tightrope/Corde raide*

Damien Atkins, Paul Dunn and Andrew Kushnir, *The Gay Heritage Project*

Ivan Coyote and Rae Spoon, *Gender Failure*

Jess Dobkin, *Everything I’ve Got*

Sunny Drake, *No Strings Attached*

Kent Monkman, selected Miss Chief performances (in *Two-Spirit Acts: Queer Indigenous Performances*)

Jordan Tannahill, *rihannaboi95* (in *The Age of Minority: Three Solo Plays*)

Alvin Erasga Tolentino and Martin Inthamoussú, *EXpose*

d’bi young.anitafrika, *She Mami Wata and the Pussy WitchHunt*

Secondary Texts:

Relevant critical readings by queer theorists and performance studies scholars have been posted to Canvas as online pdfs.

Course Requirements:

Performative queering of seminar

0%

- Building on the key paradigms of this course, each week seminar participants will take turns defamiliarizing and making strange the seminar format and space by introducing and leading a physical activity, a group game, a bit of dress-up or karaoke, etc. This exercise is conceived

as a way to both disrupt institutionalized norms of graduate study and, in a class about performance, to get us a bit more into our bodies. Have fun and be creative, but also observe the following rules: 1) five minutes max; 2) no shaming or embarrassing of your peers.

Attendance and active participation

10%

- You are expected to carefully prepare each week's readings and come to class ready to discuss them; to offer examples of the readings' application and/or relevance to the performance text(s) being considered that week; and to listen and respond to your peers and me.

Letter to theorist and discussion facilitation

25%

- In lieu of a formal summary of one of the weekly critical readings, I am asking you instead to adopt the epistolary mode and craft a letter to the author. Having read their work, what would you like to say to your addressee—or ask of them? While a degree of informality, even intimacy, might be assumed via the form, your letters should remain focused on your interlocutor's work. A part of your letter should also strive to put that work in dialogue with the performance text it has been paired with. Theorists will be assigned in the first class. In the corresponding seminar, you will be invited to read out your letter as a prompt to further discussion on both the critical reading and the performance text under consideration. You are expected to take the initial lead in facilitating this discussion. Letters should be a maximum of 4 double-spaced pages, copies of which should be emailed to me as Word documents by the Wednesday following your in-class recitation.

Project proposal

15%

- By the fourth week of class (Oct 3), you will need to have formalized plans for a final project (see below). Your project proposal should include a short abstract (roughly 300 words) detailing the focus of your study, the methods and form you will employ to undertake and present this study, an annotated list of relevant sources, and a schedule of work.

Final project presentation and paper

50%

- For your final project, you are asked to make a critical intervention into the discourse on contemporary queer performance in Canada. This might involve: a more extended analysis of one or more of the performances on the syllabus; research into an artist or company we did not get a chance to discuss; a comparison of the mandates and recent presentation histories of different queer arts organizations across the country; a response to some of the papers and video documentation of the Q2Q Conference; etc. Regarding the presentation portion of your project, you are strongly encouraged to adopt a more performative methodology by, for example, creating a short performance, video/photo essay, installation, dance, or other practice-based response to your research. You will have a maximum of 10-15 minutes for your presentations, which will take place on Dec 5. Your accompanying paper should be a maximum of 10 double-spaced pages (longer if you're collaborating, which is also encouraged), and is due Friday, Dec 9 by midnight as an emailed Word document. The weighting for the presentation and paper will be split evenly (25% + 25%).

Syllabus:

Sept 12

Introduction

Q2Q Conference pre-readings: evalyn parry, "Re-Form"

(<https://q2qconferencedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/re-form-an-informal-set-list-of-considerations.pdf>); Dave Deveau, "The Queer Playwright"

(<https://q2qconferencedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/statement-dave-deveau.pdf>);

Katie Sly, "Artist Statement"

(<https://q2qconferencedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/statement-katiesly.pdf>)

- Sept 19 Ivan Coyote and Rae Spoon, *Gender Failure* (Book + Ottawa Writers' Festival performance posted to shared Dropbox link)
- Critical reading: Jack Halberstam, from *The Queer Art of Failure*
- Sept 26 2boys.tv, *Tightrope/Corde raide* (Phénoména Festival performance posted to shared Dropbox link)
- Critical readings: Elizabeth Freeman, from *Time Binds*; and Jack Halberstam, from *In A Queer Time and Place*
- Oct 3 Jordan Tannahill, *rihannaboi95* (Text in *Age of Minority* + online Suburban Beast performance)
- Online link**: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dx6qthZCHe0>
- Critical readings: Lee Edelman, from *No Future*; and José Esteban Muñoz, from *Cruising Utopia*
- Suggested additional Q2Q reading: Cordula Quint, "Jordan Tannahill's New Queer Aesthetic" (<https://q2qconferencedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/quint-tannahillaestheticsoffailure.pdf>)
- Project proposals due**
- Oct 10 NO CLASS
- Oct 17 Kent Monkman, *Taxonomy of the European Male*, *Séance* and *Justice of the Peace* (in *Two-Spirit Acts: Queer Indigenous Performances*) + *Casualties of Modernity* (Online U of Michigan lecture/screening)
- Online link to *Casualties of Modernity* lecture presentation and film screening**: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDFAKcptgZA>
- Kent Monkman's website**: <http://www.kentmonkman.com> (for photo documentation of other performances)
- Critical readings: Andrea Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies"; and Qwo-Li Driskill, "Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques"
- Oct 24 Jess Dobkin *Everything I've Got* (Text posted to Canvas + online Edgy Women Festival performance)
- Online link**: <https://vimeo.com/172461448> (Password: unicorn)
- Critical reading: Mel Chen, from *Animacies*
- Oct 31 Damien Atkins, Paul Dunn and Andrew Kushnir, *The Gay Heritage Project* (Text posted to Canvas)
- Critical reading: Heather Love, from *Feeling Backwards*
- Suggested additional Q2Q reading: Stephen Low, "Constituting Community in *The Gay Heritage Project*"

(<https://q2qconferencedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/constituting-community-in-the-gay-heritage-project-stephen-low.pdf>)

Nov 7 Alvin Erasga Tolentino and Martin Inthamoussú, *EXpose* (Online Dance Centre performance)

Online link: <https://vimeo.com/44548907>

Critical reading: Sara Ahmed, from *Queer Phenomenology*

Nov 14 d’bi young.anitafrika, *She Mami Wata and the Pussy WitchHunt* (Online Theatre Passe Muraille performance)

Online link: <https://vimeo.com/168806003> (Password: mamiwata)

Critical reading: Zoran Pecic, from *Queer Narratives of the Caribbean Diaspora*

Nov 21 Sunny Drake, *No Strings Attached* (Online Midsumma Festival performance)

Online link: <https://youtu.be/2TOOglbPerw>

Critical readings: Susan Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges” and “Transgender Studies: Queer Theory’s Evil Twin”

Suggested additional Q2Q reading: Sunny Drake, “To Blow or Not to Blow” (<https://q2qconferencedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/to-blow-or-not-to-blow-sunny-drake.pdf>)

Nov 28 Workshopping of projects

Dec 5 Presentation of projects

Final papers due Friday, Dec 9th