

# THE 435 – 201:

## Beyond the Binary: Trans and GNC Theatre

Winter 2021; Tu/Th 2:40 – 4:10 PM

Location: Zoom

<https://depaul.zoom.us/j/9571071841>

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Office Hours: M/W 1:00 – 2:30 PM

(Please schedule through <http://calendly.com/rmirsajadi>)

### Course Description

*How have narratives of gender nonconformity and transness been conveyed and performed in the theatre? How has trans theory developed in relation to and distinct from feminist and queer theories? How are formations of trans identity couched in ideas of embodiment, passing, medicality, history, transgression, rage, desire, temporality, and mysticality? How is the notion of transness shared cross-culturally and globally, and how has it imagined differently once outside the lens of white supremacy and settler colonialism?*

These questions are at the heart of this course, and they will come up each week as we grapple with new plays, theoretical texts, and critical voices. The class offers students an introduction to the intersection of Trans and GNC identities and the theatre, first as representational entities, and then as self-crafted narratives and fabulations. Although much of societal discourse on trans and gnc identity has evolved through popular culture, television, film, and the lived experiences and visibility of trans activists and celebrities, this course will focus on dramatic literature and play texts, which have historically received less attention, even in theatre academia and pedagogy. Fundamental texts by trans and gender theorists will be paired with plays, which will provide students the ability to engage in languages of trans/gnc discourse on a deeper analytical level. Special attention will be paid to the intersection of trans identity with race, culture, ability, nationality, and class, acknowledging that these experiences are not monolithic and that there are a wide range of trans and gnc expressions, both historically and globally. The course aims to promote open dialogue and discussions that bridge the readings with current events, as well as fostering stronger analytic and writing skills.

### Course Objectives

- to develop a language with which to discuss issues of gender, sex, sexuality, race, and critical identity studies

- to deepen and probe one's knowledge of Trans and GNC performance history, dramatic literature, and theory
- to explore ways in which theatre can function as a site of activism, protest, and revolution
- to foster a dialogue that honestly engages with theatre, history, theory, and lived experience
- to strengthen critical reading, research, writing, and analytical skills

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. Careful, insightful reading or viewing of assigned plays and articles in preparation for class each day.
2. Active, thoughtful and intensive participation in class discussions and projects.
3. Reading responses, four total.
4. Body Manifesto.
5. Wikipedia project: one encyclopedic entry and preparatory assignments.
6. Midterm self-assessment paper (one page).
7. Final self-assessment paper (two pages).

### **Participation:**

A great deal of the learning in this course takes place in the virtual classroom. To participate effectively, you must be present, on time, and engaged in the discussion. If you are in need of asynchronous options for a particular class session, please reach out to me in advance to discuss how you can receive full participation credit without being present on Zoom.

### **Attendance:**

- Attendance MATTERS in this course! Being absent will affect your ability to engage with the course material. Each student is allowed two absences throughout the quarter, which can be used for whatever purpose. If you are planning on using one of your absences for a session, please email me before class to let me know!
- Your success in this course will depend on your engaged participation in class. Our discussions will be based on assigned readings, so it is crucial that you keep pace with assignments and prepare material for the day it is assigned. Regular and respectful contributions to our ongoing exploration of Trans and GNC theatre is an essential part of this class.
- Receiving attendance and participation credit for asynchronous engagement will require prior consultation with the professor.

### **Inclusivity and Engagement:**

Our goal is to collaboratively construct a class environment that fosters intellectual exploration and expression. We will be exploring material in this course that may include language or subject matter that is particularly emotionally charged, difficult, upsetting, or traumatic for members of the class. I ask that you be sensitive to yourself and your classmates. I also recognize that the nature of some of our material has the potential to cause individuals to relive traumatic experiences. Please see me if you experience apprehension about approaching particular readings, assignments, viewings, or discussions that stem from this concern.

Every student in this class will be valued and respected as an individual with distinct experiences, talents, and backgrounds. Students will be treated fairly regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, socio-economic status, or national identity. Issues of diversity will be an integral part of our class discussions, assigned readings, and assignments. We will approach our work in this course with a shared foundation of respect and a responsibility to ensure that an inclusive environment exists for all students. I encourage you to ask questions and/or to state any concerns you have -- either in class for further discussion, or privately with me -- about the sometimes sensitive, uncomfortable stuff that may emerge.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

Assignments are due by the start of class on the date stated, unless otherwise specified. If you are in need of an extension, you must reach out to me in advance to discuss your options. Assignments, participation, and the like will not be assigned letter or number grades in this class. Rather, we will engage in an emerging pedagogical style termed “ungrading,” in which the students establish collective and individual goals, then evaluate themselves based on these benchmarks. We will discuss this further in class!

### **Readings:**

There will be reading assigned for each class, which may encompass plays, video recordings, critical/historical analyses, or YouTube videos. The reading/viewing must be completed before the start of class, and students should be able to discuss them in depth and with critical rigor. The readings indicated on this syllabus may change throughout the quarter based on students’ progress and needs, but these changes will be conveyed by the professor at least two days in advance of the session.

### **Reading Responses:**

Throughout the semester, you will be required to respond to four of the plays and their accompanying readings for the class session on our D2L Discussion page. Your response can be personal, but I encourage you to use a scholarly voice and truly grapple with what is going on in the play and how the contextual readings speak to the play’s themes. Make sure that you cite the readings, use direct quotations, and be specific in your argument.

At the start of the semester, you will sign up for the five class sessions for which you will submit a reading response. You are required to write one response approximately every other week.

**Responses should be posted on D2L by 11AM the day that class is to meet.** Your responses will inform our class discussions the following day. An acceptable response will be a thoughtful analysis that synthesizes the readings and has a strong thesis in 250-500 words (although you are free to write more if you are so moved), culminating in questions for the class that will prompt a fruitful discussion of the play and articles.

### **Body Manifesto:**

The notions of embodiment, corporeality, and their tensions with cognitive feelings of gender/sex has long been at the heart of trans discourses and theories, and they are themes that are centered in many of the plays that we will be reading in this class. For this project (borrowed and adapted from Kareem Khubchandani), students will create a five-minute performance that stages “the politics of your/a/the ‘body.’” This is not an exercise in exposure, and it should be noted that bodies are often sources of trauma for Trans and GNC folx. However, as we will discuss in class, trans, queer, and other marginalized artists have historically harnessed the power of the body in performance as a means to reclaim subjectivity and expression, in opposition to hegemonic power structures in society. This body manifesto can take a variety of forms, and there is no requirement for it to be delivered in the first-person. More specific instructions for this project will be given later in the quarter. **(Body manifestos will be shared in class during weeks 4 and 5)**

### **Wiki-Scholars:**

This will be our class attempt to fill in what Suzan-Lori Parks calls the (w)hole of history. Individually, you will each create a Wikipedia username and complete training through the online portal, which will include critiquing an article and adding a line to an article of your choice. Then, you will work on a new article (or build up a very under-developed existing article) of your choice, which should be on a trans, nonbinary, etc. theatre artist. A timeline for this project, article requirements, and its various due dates will be sent out in advance, as well as a list of potential subjects for new articles. **(The project will be due on Thursday, March 11, and we will share our new articles with one another in class)**

### **Midterm Self-Assessment:**

Each student will submit a one-page, double-spaced self-assessment of their progress so far over the quarter. The self-assessment should:

- 1) Note some of the predominant themes that the student is noticing throughout class conversations and readings
- 2) Honestly articulate how the student feels they are doing in relation to the course goals and objectives that we outline as a class
- 3) Address areas of strength and set concrete goals for their engagement with the class material moving forward in the quarter

**The midterm self-assessment should be submitted as a .docx file by 11:59PM on Friday, February 5, via D2L.**

## **Final Self-Assessment:**

Each student will submit a two-page, double-spaced self-assessment of their intellectual journey over the course of the entire quarter. This self-assessment should:

- 1) Address which play, theatrical tradition, or class conversation most excited them during the quarter, and why they found this particular topic so intriguing
- 2) Convey an overarching idea about Trans and GNC theatre and theory that they learned in this course that they will take with them moving forward in their education and careers
- 3) Honestly articulate how the student feels they have performed, both in relation to the course goals and objectives that we outlined as a class, and with respect to the self-assigned goals that they set midterm
- 4) Assign themselves a letter grade, then explain why they should get this grade based on their self-assessment and our collective class criteria.

**The final self-assessment should be submitted as a .docx file by 11:59PM on Monday, March 15, via D2L.** The professor will take each student's self-assigned grade and explanation into consideration when assigning final grades. That being said, if the professor disagrees with this self-assessment, the professor can adjust a student's grade (higher or lower, accordingly), accompanied by an explanation of justification.

## **WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

### WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

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Tuesday, January 5	<b>Introductions and Overviews</b>
Thursday, January 7	<b>Trans Identities, Part I</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PLAY: <i>Trans Scripts, Part I: The Women</i> (Paul Lucas)</li><li>• Excerpts from <i>Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution</i> (Susan Stryker)</li></ul>

### WEEK 2: AND THE AWARD GOES TO...

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Tuesday, January 12	<b>Trans Villains</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PLAY: <i>M. Butterfly</i> (David Henry Hwang)</li><li>• "Sappho by Surgery: The Transsexually Constructed Lesbian-Feminist" (Janice G. Raymond)</li></ul>
Thursday, January 14	<b>Framing and Subjectivity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PLAY: <i>I Am My Own Wife</i> (Doug Wright)</li><li>• "Translation, Transition, Transgender: Framing the Life of Charlotte von Mahlsdohrf" (Brian James Baer)</li><li>• OPTIONAL: "We Love to See Power Subverted" (Doug Wright)</li></ul>

## WEEK 3: TRANS INTERSECTIONS IN THEATRE & PERFORMANCE STUDIES

Tuesday, January 19

### **Thinking Trans/Historically**

- “A Labyrinth of Onnagata” (Maki Isaka)
- Excerpts from *When Romeo Was a Woman: Charlotte Cushman and Her Circle of Female Spectators* (Lisa Merrill)
- “Transgender Studies: Queer Theory’s Evil Twin” (Susan Stryker)

Thursday, January 21

### **Performing Beyond the Binary**

GUEST SPEAKER: Jo Michael Rezes

- VIDEO: “A playful exploration of gender performance” (Jo Michael Rezes) ([https://www.ted.com/talks/jo\\_michael\\_rezes\\_a\\_playful\\_exploration\\_of\\_gender\\_performance](https://www.ted.com/talks/jo_michael_rezes_a_playful_exploration_of_gender_performance))
- “A Nonbinary Actor Prepares (for Battle)” (K. Woodzick)
- VIDEO: Excerpts from “Trans [Plays] of Remembrance Festival” (<https://howlround.com/happenings/trans-plays-remembrance-short-play-festival-live-captioned>)

## WEEK 4: TRANSITIONING THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

Tuesday, January 26

### **Transgression, Trans Rage**

- PLAY: *Virtually Yours* (Kate Bornstein)
- “Gender Outlaw, Gender Rage” (Kate Bornstein)
- “The Categories Themselves” (David Valentine)

Thursday, January 28

### **(trans)Masculinity**

GUEST SPEAKER: P. Carl

- PLAY: *Becoming a Man* (P. Carl)
- “Becoming a Man” (P. Carl) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/21/magazine/becoming-a-man.html>)
- “Becoming a White Man in the Theatre” (P. Carl) (<https://howlround.com/becoming-white-man-theatre>)

## WEEK 5: TRANS/LATING THE THEATRE CANON

Tuesday, February 2

### **Queer Legacies and Büchner**

- PLAY: *Pony* (Sylvan Oswald)
- “‘When Elephants Are in Must’: Peggy Shaw, Acts of Trans/fer, and the Present Future of Queer Desire” (Jaclyn Pryor)
- “Toward a Trans Theatre” (Sylvan Oswald)

Thursday, February 4

### **Transfeminisms and Brecht**

- PLAY: *Doctor Voynich and Her Children* (Leanna Keyes)
- “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto” (Sandy Stone)

## WEEK 6: TRANS QUOTIDIANS

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Tuesday, February 9

### **Naming and Passing (Away)**

- PLAY: *Sagittarius Ponderosa* (MJ Kaufman)
- “A New Hope: The Psychic Life of Passing” (C. Riley Snorton)

Thursday, February 11

### **Queer/Trans Time and Space**

- PLAY: *how to clean your room (and remember all your trauma)* (j. chavez)
- Excerpt from *In a Queer Time and Place* (Jack Halberstam)

## WEEK 7: FAMILIAL RETURNS AND THE AMERICAN SOUTH

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Tuesday, February 16

### **Abjection and Black Trans Lives**

- PLAY: *Crooked Parts* (Azure D. Osborne-Lee)
- Excerpts from *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (C. Riley Snorton)
- “The Trans\*-ness of Blackness, the Blackness of Trans\*-ness” (Marquis Bey)

Thursday, February 18

### **Broadening Trans Subjectivities**

#### GUEST SPEAKER: Sharifa Yasmin

- PLAY: *The Devils Between Us* (Sharifa Yasmin)
- “Decolonizing Transgender: A Roundtable Discussion”

## WEEK 8: THINKING TRANS/NATIONALLY

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Tuesday, February 23

### **MENA Genders, Sexualities, and Gender-Sexualities**

- PLAY: *She He Me* (Raphael Khouri)
- Excerpts from *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (Afsaneh Najmabadi)

Thursday, February 25

### **Sub-Saharan TransAfrica**

- PLAY: *Waafrika 1 2 3* (Nick Hadikwa Mwaluko)
- “The Emergence of a Grassroots African Trans Archive” (Liesl Theron and Tshupo Ricki Kgositau)

## WEEK 9: NONBINARY CULTURES: TWO-SPIRITS AND THIRD GENDERS

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Tuesday, March 2

### **Ojibwe Narratives Beyond the Binary**

#### GUEST SPEAKER: Ty Defoe

- PLAY: *Firebird Tattoo* (Ty Defoe)
- “A Red Face in the Crowd: Identities of a Native American Two-Spirit Writer” (Ty Defoe) (<https://howlround.com/red-face-crowd>)

- “Naming and Claiming: Recovering Ojibwe and Plains Cree Two-Spirit Language” (Kai Pyle)

Thursday, March 4

### **Hijras and South Asian Gender/Caste**

- VIDEO: “Hijras, the Kinnars Daughters”  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5O3gqFvHliU>)
- VIDEO: “A journey beyond the two check-boxes of gender” (Laxmi Tripathi)  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiXCLSXL38Q>)
- “Translating *Hijra* into Transgender” (Jeff Roy)

## WEEK 10: TRANS FUTURES

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Tuesday, March 9

### **On Broadway (Sort Of)**

- PLAY: *Hir* (Taylor Mac)
- VIDEO: “Incorporating Calamity”  
(<https://www.articulateshow.org/articulate/taylor-mac-incorporating-calamity>)
- “I Believe: A Manifesto” (Taylor Mac)  
(<https://www.articulateshow.org/articulate/taylor-macs-i-believe-a-manifesto>)

Thursday, March 11

### **The Road Ahead**

- “Beyond the Bathrooms: Cultivating Meaningful Trans Inclusion in Theatrical Spaces” (John Meredith and M Sloth Levine)  
(<https://howlround.com/beyond-bathrooms>)