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QUEER THEORY! An Academic Travesty
@ MIT November 30, December 1, 2
Cambridge, MA

MIT Associate Professor of Theater Arts and Dance tests "theory" in original play about queer lives.

Thomas DeFrantz, founder of the research/performance group SLIPPAGE: Performance, Culture, Technology, in residence at MIT, will present Queer Theory! An Academic Travesty at MIT's Kresge Little Theater, 48 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA, November 30, December 1, and December 2 at 8pm, and December 2 at 2pm. Tickets are \$6/students and \$10/general available at the door.

DeFrantz wondered, "What is Queer Theory? And how does it relate to ME?"

To answer that question, he wrote and directed his new play Queer Theory! An Academic Travesty. Commissioned by the Theater Offensive of Boston and the Flynn Center for the Arts in Burlington, Vermont, the play received a prestigious Creation Grant from the National Performance Network in 2005.

Wondering, "what's so funny about queer theory, that late 20th century academic innovation that offers the GLBT community and its allies ways to understand how society circumscribes queer life and attempts to bridge the gaps that exist between gay, lesbian, tranny, bi, same-gender-loving, S&M-ers, and their assorted queer brethren?," DeFrantz set the play inside the world of an all-day academic conference on the relevance of queer studies. Incorporating dance, music, spoken word, and dialogue, this innovative work explores queer life across boundaries of race, gender, sexuality, and the ways in which we identify.

He added, "As someone who identifies as queer at times, but always as African American; and as a Midwesterner at times, but always as male; and as an academic at times, but always as a performance artist open to asking questions and trying new things, I wondered how queer theory could help me bridge some of the and/but divides that press on me. This fantastical movement/music/theater work questions the foundations of this new branch of the academy. As I developed the work with an amazing company of collaborators, we found that the sparks fly when people disagree about the importance of race, class, gender, popular culture, philosophy, and materialist analyses of everyday queer life. In other words, the characters 'carry on,' as academics do, but in the process come to see each other as members of a 'queer tribe,' one that must work together or fall way, way apart."

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PERFORMANCE CULTURE TECHNOLOGY

Collaborators on the project include Boston-based actors Thomas-Andre Bardwell, Margaret Ann Brady, Albert M. Chan, Amatul Hannan, and Eric Hubert. The designers are Boston favorites Jennifer Simon, Eugene Tan, and Mirta Tocci.

Queer Theory! premiered in the Theater Offensive's Out On The Edge festival of 2006 at the Boston Center for the Arts, and subsequently toured to the FlynnSpace in Burlington, Vt. The work, which has greeted sold-out audiences at each of its performances, will tour colleges and venues throughout the United States over the next two years.

Queer Theory! continues the creative explorations of SLIPPAGE: Performance, Culture, and Technology, a collective of artists and researchers established in 2003. SLIPPAGE explores connections between acts of performance, formations of culture, and interventions of technology toward an end of original theatrical storytelling. Public presentations by SLIPPAGE offer audiences a glimpse into methodologies of theater that yoke performance, culture, and technology as partners in narrative exploration. Previous presentations by SLIPPAGE include Ennobling Nonna (2004); Monk's Mood (2005); and workshop productions of The House Music Project and the original musical The Downright Sexy Adventures of Drew Durango featuring New York cabaret star Darius De Haas (both 2006). Drew Durango, re-titled The Man In My Head, was a featured offering of the New York Musical Theater Festival of 2006.

Thomas DeFrantz earned degrees at Yale, City University of New York, and NYU, and has taught at NYU, Stanford, and MIT, where he is Associate Professor. An accomplished tap dancer, he has performed the Morton Gould Tap Concerto with the Boston Pops conducted by Keith Lockhart, as well as the Duke Ellington Tap Concerto ("David Danced") with the Aardvark Jazz Orchestra led by Mark Harvey. His books include the edited volume Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance (University of Wisconsin Press, 2002, winner of the CHOICE Award for Outstanding Academic Publication and the Errol Hill Award presented by the American Society for Theater Research) and Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture (Oxford University Press, 2004, winner of the de la Torre Bueno Prize for Outstanding Publication in Dance). He is the creator of Monk's Mood: A Performance on the Life and Music of Thelonious Monk, a solo piece that combines tap, technology, and jazz. The recipient of a Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Residency and a Ford Foundation Scholarship, DeFrantz acted as dramaturg and librettist for Donald Byrd/Spectrum Dance Theater production of the Sleeping Beauty Notebook, noted by the New York Times as one of the best dance events of 2005.

For information or media contacts, see <http://web.mit.edu/slippage/queertheory.htm>; contact defrantz@mit.edu or (518) 369-3458.

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