

33rd Annual CDE Conference, Konstanz (Germany), 19-22 June 2025

The German Society for Contemporary Theatre and Drama in English (CDE) is pleased to announce its 33rd Annual Conference (19-22 June 2025). It is organized by the University of Konstanz and will be held as a residential conference at Hotel St. Elisabeth in Allensbach, on the shores of Lake Constance.

New Stages for Sex, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Theatre

Questions of sex, gender and sexuality have been at the heart of political debates in recent years, as the attacks on transgender rights, the resurgence of right-wing extremism and its promotion of conservative family values and gender roles, and the amplification of so-called “culture wars” have shown. The aspirations for a postfeminist equilibrium and growing acceptance of LGBTQAI+ rights have been disappointed. The new millennium has not only witnessed new gender theories, but also controversies on sex, gender and sexuality in the arts. For instance, the #MeToo movement instigated a new wave of feminism by drawing attention to systemic sexist and abusive practices in the arts, where patterns of patriarchal control and exploitation are entrenched and habituated.

These trends did not go unnoticed in scholarly discussions. Jill Dolan, for instance, observes that the cultural debate surrounding feminist critique has “oscillated wildly across the political spectrum, from a more progressive position at one end to a much more dangerously conservative place on the other” (Dolan 2012: xiii). In this climate, a shift “from feminism to feminisms; from feminist theatre to feminist theatres” (Aston 1995: 9) has to some extent already taken place, as a survey of recent as well as long-established scholarship on sex, gender and sexuality shows (see e.g. Aston 1995; Goddard 2007; Case 2009; Greer 2012; Rosenberg, D’Urso and Winget 2021; Halferty and Cathy 2022; Angel-Perez and Rousseau 2023; Walsh 2023).

Our conference asks how the theatre has responded to and how it has fuelled or redirected these debates. Which aesthetic innovations, which new areas of investigation have evolved? How have developments in gender and queer theory been received, refuted or advanced in the theatre? How has the theatre reflected on its own institutional role and its own patriarchal, heteronormative traditions? How do economic pressures and political interests intersect (or not) in the theatre? What are the gains, gaps and limits in the relationship between theatre, theory and public discourse?

In recent years, a plethora of plays has emerged that address topics related to sex, gender and sexuality: for instance, Alice Birch’s, Ella Hickson’s and Laura Wade’s plays have explored the current state of feminisms, Tatenda Shamiso’s *No ID* thematizes gender transitions, Travis Alabanza’s *Sounds of the Underground* and Mark Gatiss’ *Queers: Eight Monologues* focus on drag and queer life, while Miriam Battye’s *Scenes with girls* explores queer relationships. Often, these plays locate questions of sex, gender and sexuality in relation to other pressing issues like disability in Jon Bradfield’s *Animal*, the intersection of gender non-conforming bodies with class and Black bodies in Travis Alabanza’s plays, the exploration of mental health in activist

performances by Scottee, or a lesbian relationship in old age in Jennifer Lunn's *Es & Flo*.

As the #MeToo movement indicates, the virtual and the analogue go hand in hand in the latest forms of feminist activism, just as discrimination based on gender and sexuality is omnipresent in the virtual world, as in Jasmine Lee-Jones' *seven methods of killing kylie jenner*. Notable plays are often experimental in genre and aesthetics, for instance Charlie Josephine's queer *Western Cowboys*. Canonical texts also remain a productive lens for negotiating current concerns of sex, gender and sexuality, from Matthew Lopez's rewriting of *Howards End* in *The Inheritance* to various adaptations of Ancient Greek and Shakespearean theatre including Zinnie Harris' *Macbeth (An Undoing)*, Natalie Boisvert's *Antigone in Spring* and Magnet Theatre's series of 'tragic reimaginings' in South Africa.

We invite proposals for papers in English of 20 minutes' length that explore how plays, playwrights, theatre practitioners, and cultural institutions are engaging with concerns of sex, gender and sexuality. Possible topics may include, but are not limited to:

- The histories and futures of feminist and queer movements on stage and page
- The intersection of sex, gender and sexuality with race / postcolonial / indigenous concerns, class, ableism / disabilities, age, ecology, etc.
- The role of social media, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence for staging sex, gender and sexuality
- Theatrical articulations of and/or responses to / forms of queer theory, black feminism, eco-feminism, bad feminism, post-feminism, etc.
- (New) Aesthetics for political concerns, e.g. transgender representations, feminist futures, queer forms and temporalities, nightclub, drag and working-class forms of theatre, etc.
- Intersections of sex, gender and sexuality with (the politics of) emotions and affect
- Theatre and sexual health as well as queer care and communities
- The complex notion of authenticity, embodiment and representation in theatrical renditions of sex, gender and sexuality
- Theatre as a safe space vs theatre as a space of risk-taking and provocation
- Institutional responses to the call for equality, diversity and inclusion

In accordance with CDE's constitutional policy, papers should deal exclusively with contemporary (i.e. post-1989) theatre and drama in English.

Abstracts: Abstracts (300 words) for papers proposed (20 minutes maximum delivery time) should be accompanied by a short biographical note.

Deadline: 1 October 2024

Send to: cde2025@uni-konstanz.de

Organising team: Department of Literature, Arts and Media Studies, University of Konstanz
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Support: Eszter Vass

Selected papers will be published in a special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English (JCDE)*.

CDE encourages contributions by emerging scholars. Scholars who work on a PhD in the field of contemporary theatre and drama (even if the PhD topic is not related to the conference topic) may apply to the CDE PhD Forum, which will take place on 19 June near the conference venue in Konstanz. For further information please see <http://contemporarydrama.de/phd-forum/>

NB: Only paid-up members are eligible to give papers at CDE conferences. Membership subscriptions should be taken out or renewed prior to the conference. For details, please contact CDE's treasurer Martin Riedelsheimer (martin.riedelsheimer@uni-a.de).

Bibliography:

- Angel-Perez, Elizabeth, and Aloysia Rousseau, eds. *The New Wave of British Women Playwrights*. De Gruyter, 2023.
- Aston, Elaine. *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre*. Routledge, 1995.
- Case, Sue-Ellen. *Feminist and Queer Performance: Critical Strategies*. Red Globe Press, 2009.
- Dolan, Jill. *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*. University of Michigan Press, 2012.
- Goddard, Lynette. *Staging Black Feminisms: Identity, Politics, Performance*. Palgrave, 2007.
- Greer, Stephen. *Contemporary British Queer Performance*. Palgrave, 2012.
- Halferty, Paul, and Cathy Leeney, eds. *Analysing Gender in Performance*. Palgrave, 2022.
- Rosenberg, Tina, Sandra D'Urso, and Anna Renée Winget, eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of Queer and Trans Feminisms in Contemporary Performance*. Palgrave, 2021.
- Walsh, Fintan. *Performing the Queer Past: Public Possessions*. Methuen Drama, 2023.