

History of the Theatre: Stages and Technology, Interdisciplinary
Prof. Christopher Swift, Department of Humanities

THEATER RESEARCH AND GIS PROJECT

Prologue

Historical NYC (2 days of readings, lectures on the development of NYC theater communities and institutions). Students understand how economics, immigration, urban development, transportation, and development of performance forms shaped the growth and change of theater in NYC.

Act I: The Living Archive (10% of final grade)

1. Teams of 2 students each select neighborhood and theater

The United Palace Theater (Washington Heights)
The Public Theater (Village)
Apollo Theater (Harlem)
National Black Theater (Harlem)
Signature Theater (Midtown West)
Playwrights Horizons (Midtown West)
Keen Company (Theater Row)
Joyce Theater (Chelsea)
Atlantic Theater (Chelsea)
Beacon Theater (Upper West Side)
Studio 54 (Columbus Circle)
Vivian Beaumont theaters (3) (Lincoln Center)
Vineyard Theater (Union Square)
Lucille Lortel (West Village)
The Cherry Lane (West Village)
Performance Space NY (East Village)
La Mama (East Village)
New York Theater Workshop (East Village)
Abron Arts Center (1915 Playhouse) (Lower East Side)
The Performing Garage/Wooster Group (SoHo)
St. Ann's Warehouse (DUMBO)
Harvey Theater (BAM) (Ft. Greene)
The Gilman Opera House (BAM) (Ft. Greene)
Theatre for a New Audience, Polonsky Shakespeare Center (Ft. Greene)
Lowe's Kings Theater (Flatbush)
St. George Theater (Staten Island)

2. Purchase tickets to production at the theater

3. Place-based (on site) research: attend production, sketch interiors and exteriors, and photograph exterior. Read the Playbill, talk to theater professionals, and make observations in order to answer the following:
 - What type of performance did you see? What was the name of the production? What was the genre? Describe the set design. Was it realistic, minimalist, abstract, or (something else)?
 - What was the cost of the ticket? What kinds of people were in the audience (age ranges, race/ethnicity, locals/tourists)? How many seats are in the house?
 - What is the *program* of the architecture of the theater? In other words, how did the design and dimensions of the stage and house inform your reception of the play? How did the design instruct audience members to move through the entire building? How large is the stage and does it permit a variety of presentation styles?
4. Provide answers to these questions as a team in blog section of OpenLab. Minimum 250 words.

Act II. Bibliography, images, sketches, ticket stub (15% of final grade)

Submit a research report that contains:

- a) An annotated bibliography: three sources (minimum one published source) containing historical and architectural information. Each annotation should be two paragraphs in length, minimum, and contain detailed historical information about the construction, architecture, resident company, and production history of the theater.
 - Why was the theater built? By whom? For whom? For what kinds of productions?
 - Who was the architect? What is the architectural style?
 - What is the history of the current resident company? What is the mission of the resident company or artistic director or producing director? What kinds of performances do they present, and for whom?
- b) Photographic images to be used in presentation, with CC attributions.
- c) Sketches
- d) Ticket stub

Act III: Virtual Research: The Community

Scenario: You have been hired to conduct an analysis of the demographics, urban infrastructure and social conditions of a neighborhood for your theater. The producers want to be able to connect with the community and produce theater that attracts locals. What infrastructure supports access? What conditions are hurting or helping ticket sales?

1. GIS workshop 1: Story Maps
2. GIS workshop 2: Data mining
3. Accessing open-source data, collect GIS data that will help you understand your neighborhood:
 - Who are the locals? Demographics: education, income, ethnicity, age.
 - Are the people who populate the area residents, tourists, or workers?
 - How much (and which parts) of the area are zoned for commercial vs. residential?
 - Access: what kinds of public transportation are available? Parking?
 - Is crime a problem? What about noise pollution?

- What types of commercial activity exists in the area: food service, entertainment, office space, retail space, etc.
- 4. Create a GIS map with layers that graphically display urban artifacts and conditions.
- 5. What kinds of plays and entertainments would attract the local community?

Act IV: Presentations (20% of final grade)

The goal of the presentation is to present your answers to the research questions in Act III, with special attention to the analysis of the data collected and what this data tells you about potential audiences for your theater. Research from Acts I and II will also inform your analysis.

Slides:

1. Introduction
2. Neighborhood map with theater pin and pop-up
3. Image: Architect and examples of work
4. Images: Design and architecture of theater
5. Images: Stage arrangement and auditorium, floor plans
6. Images: Historical productions
7. The theater today: mission, productions
8. Neighborhood map with layers (multiple layers)