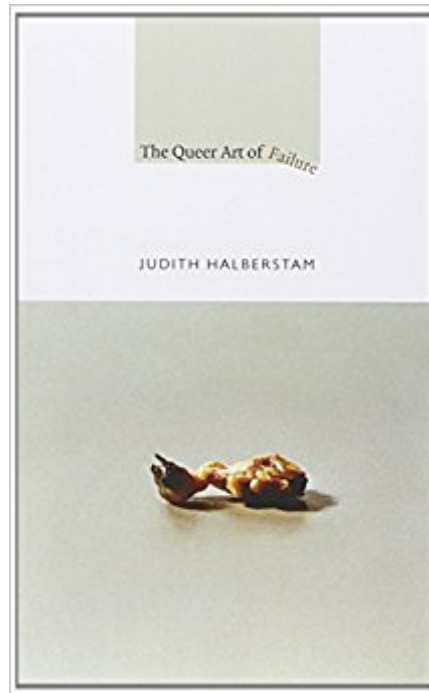




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# The Queer Art Of Failure (a John Hope Franklin Center Book)



## Synopsis

The Queer Art of Failure is about finding alternatives to conventional understandings of success in a heteronormative, capitalist society; to academic disciplines that confirm what is already known according to approved methods of knowing; and to cultural criticism that claims to break new ground but cleaves to conventional archives. Judith Halberstam proposes "low theory" as a mode of thinking and writing that operates at many different levels at once. Low theory is derived from eccentric archives. It runs the risk of not being taken seriously. It entails a willingness to fail and to lose one's way, to pursue difficult questions about complicity, and to find counterintuitive forms of resistance. Tacking back and forth between high theory and low theory, high culture and low culture, Halberstam looks for the unexpected and subversive in popular culture, avant-garde performance, and queer art. She pays particular attention to animated children's films, revealing narratives filled with unexpected encounters between the childish, the transformative, and the queer. Failure sometimes offers more creative, cooperative, and surprising ways of being in the world, even as it forces us to face the dark side of life, love, and libido.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A lively and thought-provoking examination of how the homogenizing tendencies of modern society might be resisted through the creative application of failure, forgetting, and passivity, actions generally deemed of little value within today's capitalist models of success. . . . [A]s a close reader

of popular culture, she is exemplary, and as a valiant attempt to find value in positions and attitudes such as negativity that our modern success-oriented society disdains, this study is never less than thrilling.

• Publishers Weekly

“Queer Theory using Spongebob Squarepants? Totally there... Underdogs and shoddy queers can take wordy, erudite solace in Halberstam’s words.

• Gay Times

“[H]ere is a book well worth the time and attention it takes to read it and to consider its implications. Most especially in that Judith Halberstam writes not only with authority, but also with genuine wit, which leaves the reader laughing out loud from time to time, something quite unknown until now in books of queer theory. Further, Ms. Halberstam presents her case with deep insight into human nature, and into our deepset cultural need to simplify our definition of the word success and, up until now, our seeming need to ignore the creative implications of failure.

• Vinton Rafe McCabe, New York Journal of Books

“All losers are the heirs of those who have lost before them. The Queer Art of Failure narrates hilarious and swerving outlaw comedies of refusal, absurdity, and exuberant being, acting in solidarity with its resident artists from SpongeBob SquarePants to Yoko Ono. But the book hums a dark tone, too. The arts of normative style, playing out on sexual, racialized, gendered, and colonial bodies and landscapes, are painful to witness, even here. No artist or critic can repair the damage, erasing history, but Judith Halberstam wields all of the weapons that intelligence (and cartoons) can bring against the harsh work of conventionality.

• Lauren Berlant, author of Cruel Optimism

“The Queer Art of Failure is a manifesto for cultural studies. It self-consciously risks being dismissed or trashed in order to rescue alternative objects of analysis, methods of knowing, and ways of communicating. Its stakes are clear. It’s not attempting to argue for the recovery of its materials from obscurity; it values forgetting and obsolescence. It’s not claiming to retool our understanding of major work; it traffics unapologetically in the minor. And it doesn’t pretend to comprehensive scholarship; it offers up plot summaries and allegorical readings with glee.

• Elizabeth Freeman, author of Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories

“The Queer Art of Failure is inspired, provocative, and hilarious. More significantly, it is a deft evisceration of the regulative rigidities of disciplinarity and the pretensions of high theory.

• Judith Halberstam’s advocacy of silly archives and low theory is much more than a carnivalesque skewering of the earnest self-seriousness of much academic scholarship; it is a populist clarion call for expansive democratic visions of what it is we are writing about and for whom we think we are writing.

• Lisa Duggan, author of The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural

Politics, and the Attack on Democracy” “Failure abounds all around us: economies collapse, nation-states falter, and malfeasance rules. In the face of our dismal situation, Judith Halberstam distills and repurposes the negative in order to think outside the tyranny of success. The Queer Art of Failure finds a new vitality in not winning, accumulating, doing, or knowing. Both counterintuitive and anti-anticipatable, this compelling book pushes beyond many of the impasses and blockages that limit our critical horizons today.” —Joselyn Esteban Muñoz, author of *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* “[H]ere is a book well worth the time and attention it takes to read it and to consider its implications. Most especially in that Judith Halberstam writes not only with authority, but also with genuine wit, which leaves the reader laughing out loud from time to time, something quite unknown until now in books of queer theory. Further, Ms. Halberstam presents her case with deep insight into human nature, and into our deepset cultural need to simplify our definition of the word success—and, up until now, our seeming need to ignore the creative implications of failure.” (Vinton Rafe McCabe *New York Journal of Books*) “Queer Theory using Spongebob Squarepants? Totally there... Underdogs and shoddy queers can take wordy, erudite solace in Halberstam’s words.” (Gay Times) A lively and thought-provoking examination of how the homogenizing tendencies of modern society might be resisted through the creative application of failure, forgetting, and passivity, actions generally deemed of little value within today’s capitalist models of success. . . . [A]s a close reader of popular culture, she is exemplary, and as a valiant attempt to find value in positions and attitudes such as negativity that our modern success-oriented society disdains, this study is never less than thrilling.” (Publishers Weekly)

Judith Halberstam is Professor of English, American Studies and Ethnicity, and Gender Studies at the University of Southern California. Halberstam is the author of *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, as well as *Female Masculinity* and *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, both also published by Duke University Press.

Alot of food for thought and reflection. Well written and intelligent.

What a brilliant book!

Phenomenal

I must say that, as a scholar I was impressed with this work, but as a queer member of society, I was also moved by the possibilities suggested herein. In so many ways this work has had a profound impact on my life and the way that I see the world.

Came in wrap. So, I knew it was brand new!

I really don't read too much critical theory, but this book was introduced to me by the phrase "this should be required reading for gay people!" so I gave it a shot. It was a bit of a difficult read, in that I'm not sure I understood everything in the first pass, but the prose is often phenomenal and issues she raises gave me some fertile ground for thought and discussion with friends. I'll probably read this book a second time after sitting with it for a while.

This is one of the most refreshing critical theory books I have read in a long time. In this book, Halberstam advocates for a queer failure that defies capitalist models of success. This queer failure embraces forgetting, stupidity and CGI animated films. Halberstam provides examples of failure which she reclaims, from coming in 4th place in the Olympics to the characters in the movie "Dude, Where's My Car?" The section on the queer politics of CGI animated films is especially good. With loads of examples such as "Finding Nemo," "Monsters INC," "Bee Movie," and more, she explores the underlying messages of socialist revolt present in the films and how they challenge capitalist models of success.<sup>2</sup> things in particular make this book especially worth reading. 1. The use of "low theory" as an alternative to "high theory" allows for an imminently readable text that is full of extended pop culture analysis that reclaims a lot of films you probably don't take too seriously. And 2. The writing is relaxed, fun and at times funny. It doesn't read like your average academic text. And while I breezed through it, it is also really provocative. I highly recommend it.

This is a fascinating subject, but a kind of academic tour. The art which was de-constructed didn't interest me initially, so I didn't care much what insights were gained.

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