QUEER THEORY, QUEER PERFORMANCE
Fall 2019 GEN&WS 340
Professor James McMaster
Class Time: 11am-12:15pm, Tu and Th
Class Location: Chamberlin 2120
Email Address: jmcmaster@wisc.edu
Office Hours: Tues., 4-5pm
Office Location: Sterling 3418
Course URL: https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/168463

TOPIC DESCRIPTION:
What does it mean to “perform” queerness and transness? What difference does queer and trans performance make in an anti-queer and anti-trans world? What difference can it make? This course leads students on a search for the answers to these questions, taking queer theory and queer performance as our guides. We will think through central concepts in queer and trans studies like performativity, stigma, desire, worldmaking, homonationalism, assimilation, abolition, and utopia. We will also look at a variety of performance examples from activists, artists, and even authors like ACT-UP, Carmelita Tropicana, Đặng Võ, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Mark Aguhar, Alok Vaid-Menon, Maggie Nelson, and others. Throughout the semester, students will practice speaking and writing to others in ways that are informed by the insights and ethics of queer and trans study. The goals: to cultivate a vision of a more just world for queer and trans people and to arm students with some of the tools needed to make that vision into a reality.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Topics in feminist study of LGBTQ sexualities, considering race, nationality, and time.

COURSE ATTRIBUTES:
3 credit units; prerequisites: none; intermediate level; humanities (H) or social science (S); face-to-face instruction; counts as Liberal Arts and Science credit in L&S; counts toward 50% graduate coursework requirement.

REQUIRED TEXTS:
The following are available for purchase at A Room of One’s Own, 315 W. Gorham St.:

• Stigma by Erving Goffman.
• *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha.

• *TestoJunkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* by Paul B. Preciado.

• *The Argonauts* by Maggie Nelson.

*Femme in Public* by Alok Vaid-Menon is available for purchase as a PDF here: https://www.alokvmenon.com/store/femmeinpublicebook

* All other readings are available as PDF downloads on our CANVAS course website.

**COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

Students will...

...demonstrate an understanding of concepts central to gender and women’s studies including theories of queerness, transness, race, disability, diaspora, nation, abolition, aesthetics, and performance.

...amass knowledge about major queer and trans theorists, artists, and activists of the last four decades.

...practice engaging others in written and spoken conversation about identity and power, moving from summary to analysis and resulting in increased self and social awareness.

...translate aesthetic and social experience into theory, and vice versa, in creative ways and in the service of anti-heterosexist and anti-transphobic social change.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:**

• This class meets for two 75-minute class periods each week over the semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying, collaborating, etc.) for about 3 hours out of classroom for every class period. This syllabus includes more information about meeting times and expectations for student work.

**PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE** *(20% of Final Grade)*

• *Attendance* is required. If a student must miss class for an excusable reason, proof of excuse (doctor’s note, etc.) must be provided. Any unexcused absences will lower the student’s final grade.

• Active and thoughtful *participation* is required. Failure to participate will lower your grade. If participating in class is difficult for you for whatever reason, please see me.
REFLECTION ASSIGNMENTS (UG: 45% of Final Grade, 15% each; GRAD: 40% of Final Grade, 10% each)

1) Critical Conversation.

There are connections to be made between “the burden of liveness” (Muñoz), “stigma” (Goffman), and “paranoia” (Sedgwick). In assigned groups, your task is to have, record, and transcribe a critical conversation that aspires (or even struggles!) to make those connections. Your conversation should be a minimum of 30-45 minutes long. First, what do each of these terms mean on their own? Then, what do we learn about each of these terms when we think about them alongside the others?

Some guidelines:

• *As always, move up and move back.* Be mindful of how much space you are taking up relative to the people you are in conversation with. It is everyone’s responsibility to make sure that each individual member of the group gets their share of airtime. (This is just good life practice!) Your grade will be affected if you take up either too much or too little space.
• *Don’t feel like you need to have all the answers.* It is okay to grapple, struggle, and fumble with ideas in the midst of the conversation. The point is not to display mastery, the point is to end the conversation having collectively pieced together a sum of insights that you could not have arrived at individually.
• Your grade will be based on the quality of your contribution to the conversation and the sincerity of your effort.

On the due date, all students should also submit a one-paragraph account (on CANVAS) of how labor was distributed for this project (who did what work?).

Due Date: 10/8

2) Scavenger Hunt Posts.

Your task is to produce three posts (in the style of extended Instagram or Tumblr posts), each including a photo (that you take, not a screenshot) and a 250 word caption that identifies, describes, and analyzes how one of the following types of performance seeks to make more space for queer life in an anti-queer world.

Queer Performance Proper. (Moore, Muñoz, Chambers-Letson)

Performative Queer Activism. (Cohen, Stryker, Crimp, ACT UP)
Queer Caring Performance. (Chambers-Letson, Piepzna-Samarasinha)

Some guidelines:

- *Use what you’ve learned.* In your post you are to use relevant readings from the course to make sense of the performances you choose. This means explicitly referencing or even quoting from those texts.
- Finding worthy performances to post about is part of the assignment. *Be resourceful.* Look to *Our Lives* magazine for guidance. Or Google. Queer performance is all around if you know how and where to look for it. Think expansively about what might “count” and make the argument for it.
- You will be graded on the concision, complexity, and creativity of your posts. *Be bold and aspire to beauty and brilliance* in your photography and writing.
- Your post should be especially attentive to where and when the given performance is occurring. *Don’t forget about what Herring and Tongson have taught us.*

_Due Date: 10/29_
* Submit in CANVAS.


Write a position paper in three parts. You must engage with and cite the relevant course materials. Enter the debate! Whose side are you on? Who do you disagree with? What do you think? And why?

- *Part One* should take a position on the following question: Can our most intimate desires (our sexual orientations, our gender identities/desires, our racial “preferences,” our “preference” for certain kinds of bodies [thin, abled] over others) change?
- *Part Two* should take a position on the following question: When should we seek (or be made) to change our desires and why?
- *Part Three* should take a position on the following question: How might we go about successfully changing our desires? OR, why is changing our desires impossible?

Each section of the position paper should be 250 words long for a total of 750 words.

_Due Date: 11/19_
- Submit in CANVAS.
4) **Graduate Students Only: Abolition Journal Entry**

Imagine that someone you love dearly (a parent, a sibling, a best friend, a partner) has committed some significant kind of harm. In the form of a 750 word journal entry, describe what they might have done and what has resulted. Explain why you may not turn to solutions provided by the state (i.e., police and prisons) in this situation. Describe the abolitionist and transformative approach that you and other loved ones might take instead to address that harm. Be specific. Go there.

_Due Date: 12/10_
* Submit in CANVAS.

**CREATIVE REPRESENTATION PROJECT** (35% of Final Grade; 5% for the proposal, 10% for the annotated bibliography, and 20% for the representation)

For the final assignment you will produce a creative representation of your new (developing) understanding of queer theory, queer performance, and the relationship of both to power and social justice. Your representation may take many forms: a podcast, a music video, a filmed work of performance art, a short set of poems, a collage, something else—BE INVENTIVE (you may not write a term paper). Whatever your produce you must be able to submit to me either physically or digitally. If you choose, for example, to engage in public protest art as your representation you must be able to submit enduring footage of your action.

_All creative representations will be accompanied by an annotated bibliography_ listing and explaining how at least six texts from the course (10 for graduate students) provide a theoretical underpinning or aesthetic influence for your project. You will be graded on the clarity and ingenuity with which your project incorporates and displays an understanding of the readings included in your bibliography.

Students will be required to submit a 100 word proposal for their project by 11/5.

_Due Date: 12/13_
* Submit in CANVAS.

**EXTRA CREDIT** (+5 points to your final grade, REQUIRED FOR GRADS)

Read:  _The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions_ by Larry Mitchell
   “Friendship as a Way of Life” by Michel Foucault

Write a 500 word letter to your best friend (real or fictional) shedding light on the queer elements of your friendship. Which do you love? Which destabilize you? What difference do they make to you? To the world? You must think with both texts—
quoting from them but doing more than that with them too. Your letter should aspire to move its reader.

Due prior to 12/10
* Submit in CANVAS.

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<tr>
<th>Grade Totals</th>
<th>Final Grade Scale</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation and Attendance: 20%</td>
<td>92.5-100% = A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Conversation: 15%/10%</td>
<td>87.5-92.4% = AB</td>
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<td>Scavenger Hunt Posts: 15%/10%</td>
<td>82.5-87.4% = B</td>
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<td>Desire Position Paper: 15%/10%</td>
<td>77.5-82.4% = BC</td>
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<td>Grads: Abolition Journal Entry: 10%</td>
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<td>Creative Representation Proposal: 5%</td>
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<td>Annotated Bibliography: 10%</td>
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<td>Creative Representation: 20%</td>
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**COURSE POLICIES**

Email: Assume that I will respond to your e-mail within 24 hours. If I have not responded within that amount of time, feel free to e-mail me again.

Technology: No inappropriate use of cell phones and laptops. I will notice. Your performance and your participation grade will likely suffer. However, these devices are fine for taking notes and referencing readings.

Honesty: Please read the university policy on academic integrity (https://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/). All information borrowed from print sources or the web must be clearly identified and properly credited. Any instance of plagiarism or cheating on written assignments will result in an “F” grade for the assignment and the course.

Late Work: All assignments are due when the syllabus says they are due. Extensions should be requested a week in advance of the due date. 5% points will be subtracted from your grade for each class session that an assignment is late without an extension.

Accommodations: Any student who feels that they may need special accommodation due to a disability should contact the McBurney Disability Resource Center (http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/) at 608-263-2741 (phone); 263-6393 (TTY); 263-2998 (FAX); FrontDesk@mb.wisc.edu to ensure that accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.
COURSE CALENDAR:

Week 1: Introductions

9/5: Third World Gay Revolution, “What We Want, What We Believe.”

Week 2: Politics and Performativity


Week 3: Performance and Paranoia


9/19: Eve Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You.” (123-151).

Week 4: Everyday Life


Week 5: Everynight Life


Alok Vaid Menon, *Femme In Public*.

10/3: Jennie Livingston, *Paris is Burning*.

**Week 6: Riots and Resistance**

10/8: Susan Stryker, *Screaming Queens*.

Susan Stryker, “Transgender Liberation,” (59-90)

*Critical Conversation Due*

10/10: David France, *How To Survive a Plague*.


**Week 7: Reproductive Labors**


**Week 8: Critical Anti-Urbanism**


**Week 9: The Pharmacopornographic**

*Scavenger Hunt Posts Due.*


**Week 10: Desire and Desirability**


Amia Srinivasan, “Does anyone have the right to sex?”
https://www.lrb.co.uk/v40/n06/amia-srinivasan/does-anyone-have-the-right-to-sex

Andrea Long Chu, “Wanting Bad Things,”


* Creative Representation Proposal Due.*


Mark Aguhar, Roy Pérez, and Juana Peralta, *Call Out Queen Zine*.

Roy Pérez, “Mark Aguhar’s Critical Flippancy,”

Mia Mingus, “Moving Toward the Ugly: A Politic Beyond Desirability.”

**Week 11: Diaspora and Nation**


Selections from *Against Equality*, (15-21, 27-32).

**Week 12: A New Normal**


*Desire Position Paper Due.*


**Week 13**

11/26: NO CLASS

*This is a great time to complete the extra credit assignment.*

**Week 14: Queer and Trans Abolition**

12/3: Morgan Bassichis, Alexander Lee, and Dean Spade, “Building an Abolitionist Trans and Queer Movement with Everything We’ve Got,” (15-40).

Week 15: Utopia


Third World Gay Revolution, “What We Want, What We Believe.”

* Grads: Queer Friendship Letter and Abolition Journal Entry Due.

* Creative Representation Project Due: 12/13.