THE PERFORMANCE OF EVERYDAY LIFE:
Race, Gender, Aesthetics
Spring 2020, GWS 340
Professor James McMaster
Class Time: 9:30-10:45
Class Location: Sterling 2301
Email Address: jmcmaster@wisc.edu
Office Hours: Tue, 11:00-12:00pm
Office Location: Sterling 3418
Course URL: https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/190305

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course will ask the following basic questions: what do we ordinarily do? Why do we do it? And, what effect does that doing have in the world? Or, put more succinctly, what does it mean to live a life given our current political realities? The first half of the course will be split into two quarters, the first of which will consist of readings in performance theory and the second will consist of readings in aesthetic theory. These will be the two theoretical lenses through which we will study ordinary racial, gendered, and sexual life in the latter half of the course, which will draw explicitly from readings in queer and trans studies, black studies, Asian American studies, Marxism, and anarchism. Our time in the classroom will be spent building a collective analysis of how life is lived and organized in order to build a collective analysis of how life might be lived and organized differently, in a more egalitarian way. The writers whose work we will be engaging include: Richard Schechner, Diana Taylor, Erving Goffman, Lauren Berlant, Saidiya Hartman, José Esteban Muñoz, Jacques Ranciere, Jack Halberstam, Jodi Dean, and Fred Moten.

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.:
• *Females* by Andrea Long Chu

* All other readings are available as PDF downloads on our CANVAS course website unless otherwise indicated in the syllabus.

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**COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

Students will...

...demonstrate an understanding of concepts central to gender and women's studies including theories of the ordinary, the everyday, aesthetics, gender, queerness, transness, race, and class.

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

...synthesize theories of everyday life with the lived experience of everyday life in order to think and live better.

...amass knowledge and develop critical thinking skills pertaining to both how we are forced to live in the world and alternative ways of living in the world that may be more egalitarian.

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**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.

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

• Attendance is required. Each student is allotted two unexcused absences, and each subsequent unexcused absence will result in the subtraction of two points from that student's final grade in the course. For an absence to be excused, you must either provide proof of excuse (doctors note, etc.) or receive instructor permission prior to the absence. Lateness is also not allowed and being late will negatively impact your attendance grade.

• Active and thoughtful participation is required in both small and large group discussion. Part of the purpose of class time is to practice sustaining your thoughts out loud, exposed to others and to your own ineloquence. It’s an important life skill, and, for this reason, I take (and grade) participation seriously. I don’t expect you to always have the correct answer, only to
always, earnestly, be trying to find it. If participating in class is difficult for you for whatever reason, please see me in office hours.

CONVERSATION ASSIGNMENT (20% of Final Grade)

What is performance and how can we use it to understand everyday life, as it’s lived both in person and on social media? What do the following terms have to do with one another: “performance,” “restored behavior,” “the repertoire,” “impression,” “situation,” “involvement,” and the “internet”? In assigned groups, your task is to have and record a critical conversation that aspires (or even struggles!) to answer these questions. This conversation should draw extensively and explicitly on the Schechner, Taylor, Goffman, and Tolentino readings. You should also make reference to *The Circle* and *PEN15*. Your conversation should be (a maximum) of 30 minutes long. In answering this assignment’s question, be explicit about how different theorists may use these terms to mean slightly different things. You should also be sure to emphasize how thinking about performance as these writers do helps us to think about the lived realities of race, gender, sexuality, disability, and other categories of otherness.

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.

- **It is okay to grapple, struggle, and fumble with ideas in the midst of the conversation.** The point is not to display individual mastery, the point is to end the conversation having collectively pieced together a sum of insights that you could not have arrived at individually.

- **You will be graded as a group and as an individual.** The group grade (out of 10) is based on whether you’ve collectively articulated the theory correctly. Your individual assignment (out of 10) is based on the degree to which you made an earnest and active effort at achieving the group grade.

Due Date: 11:59pm, 2/11/2020.

*Submit via Box.

SHORT PAPER 1 (15% of Final Grade)

Short paper one should include three sections. The first section should explain Lauren Berlant’s theory of cruel optimism in your own words, quoting minimally but where necessary. The second should apply Berlant’s theory to a relation of cruel
optimism that you’ve either experienced or observed at some point during your life. The third should relate Berlant’s theory back to prior course readings by answering the question, how does Berlant help us to think about performance? The paper should be no more than three pages long. It will be graded based on the clarity of your writing and the accuracy with which you explain, apply, and relate the most central aspects of Berlant’s theory. The paper must be typed, double spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman, and consistent in its citation style.

*Due Date: 11:59pm, 2/27/2020
*Submit in CANVAS.

**SHORT PAPER 2 (15% of Final Grade)**

Drawing on Ranciere, Chuh, Muñoz, Ngai, and Berlant answer the following questions. What are we talking about when we’re talking about “the aesthetic”? What function does it serve? What political potential does it hold? As with the conversation assignment, be explicit about how different theorists may think differently about the aesthetic, but be explicit, too, about the views that they share. The paper should be three pages long. It will be graded based on the clarity of your writing and the accuracy of your reading. The paper must be typed, double spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman, and consistent in its citation style.

*Due Date: 11:59pm, 3/12/2020
*Submit in CANVAS.

**MANIFESTO ASSIGNMENT (30% of Final Grade)**

For the final paper, students will complete a manifesto that aims to do two things. First, it should give an account of how lives are lived, which is to say performed, in the present. What political realities shorten the lives of minoritized subjects, and how do those play out in social situations? Be specific, use examples. Second, it should propose performance-based strategies for transforming the way that ordinary life is reproduced. How might people relate to each other and the world differently? How should we describe that relating? You may find yourself doubling down on categories like “protest,” “the party,” “waywardness,” “disorder,” “charisma,” “aesthetics,” “study,” “allyship,” “comradeship,” “wildness,” “pleasure,” “anarchy,” or “communism.” You might find yourself dismissing such categories. Whatever the case, you must be in conversation with the course materials from which these terms are taken. Following in the example of thinkers like brown, Chu, Hartman, Chambers-Letson, and Harney and Moten, you should feel free to experiment with style. Your goal is to move your reader to live differently, to induce new social realities with your writing, ones in which minoritized lives are much more livable. You will be graded on how likely your manifesto is to do this, as well as on the clarity and accuracy of your engagement with the course materials. Your
manifesto should be typed and no longer than 6 pages. Formatting decisions are up to you, but they should support the argument of the manifesto. Students may complete this assignment individually or in groups.

*Due Date: 11:59pm, 5/2/2020
*Submit in CANVAS.

**EXTRA CREDIT (3% of Final Grade)**

On Thursday, April 2, from 4-5:30pm Martin Manalansan will be giving a public lecture on campus. If you attend the lecture and submit a two-page response paper, you will receive an additional three percentage points added to your final grade for the semester. The response paper is pass fail. It should provide an account of the talk’s argument and major themes, as well as an account of the question and answer session. It should then relate the talk back to our course.

*Due Date: 11:59pm, 4/7/2020
*Submit in CANVAS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Totals</th>
<th>Final Grade Scale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation and Attendance: 20%</td>
<td>92.5-100% = A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation Assignment: 20%</td>
<td>87.5-92.4% = AB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Paper 1: 15%</td>
<td>82.5-87.4% = B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Paper 2: 15%</td>
<td>77.5-82.4% = BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manifesto Assignment: 30%</td>
<td>59.5-69.4% = D</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extra Credit: 3%</td>
<td>59.4% and below = F</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. I generally do not respond to emails during weekends or breaks. Plan accordingly.

**Technology:** No inappropriate use of cell phones and laptops. I am a millennial, I will notice. While these devices are fine for taking notes, I will quietly subtract points from your participation grade if I notice you using these devices inappropriately in class.

**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 at least a week in advance of the due date. Late assignments will be subject to grade penalties at the instructor’s discretion.

**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@mcwisc.edu to ensure that accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

**Class Conduct:** Racism, misogyny, heterosexism, ableism, transmisogyny, xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, classism and other forms of oppressive speech or behavior will not be tolerated. We seek to understand these systems, not to reproduce them.

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**COURSE CALENDAR:**

**Week 1: Introducing Performance**


**Week 2: Impression and Involvement**


**Week 3: The Internet**

2/6: No Class. On your own, please view at least one episode of The Circle on Netflix, as well as the episode of PEN15 titled “AIM” on HULU.

Week 4: Cruel Optimism


*Conversation Assignment Due.


Lauren Berlant, Tavia Nyong’o, Ann Pellegrini, and José Esteban Muñoz, “Public Feelings Salon,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlOeWTa_M0U&t=4380s (43:06 onward).

Lauren Berlant, “Why Chasing the Good Life is Holding Us Back,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ppdd2R46Eh4&t=293s

Week 5: Slow Death


Week 6: The Politics of Aesthetics


*Short Paper 1 Due.

Week 7: Queer Aesthetics and Activism


Week 8: On Daddys and Dudes

3/10: Jordy Rosenberg, “The Daddy Dialectic,”


*Short Paper 2 Due.

Week 9: Spring Break

3/17: No Class.

3/19: No Class.

Week 10: On Females


Week 11: Writing Minor Lives


    Jack Halberstam, “Minor Revolutionaries: A New Chapter in Queer Studies,”

*Manalansan Talk, 4-6pm, Orchard View Room, Discovery Center.

Week 12: Forever War


*Extra Credit Due.

4/9: No Class.

Week 13: Communism, Comrades, and Choreography


Week 14: Wild, Anarchic Politics

4/21: James C. Scott, Excerpt from “Preface” and “the Uses of Disorder and ‘Charisma’” in Three Cheers for Anarchism, xii-xxvi, 1-29.


Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, “Politics Surrounded,” in The Undercommons, 14-20.

Week 15: The Undercommons

4/28: Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, “The University and the Undercommons,” in The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study, 22-43.

*Manifesto Assignment Due, 5/2/2020.*