

# THEORETICAL ISSUES IN QUEER STUDIES

## WST 485

**Instructor: Prof. Nishant Shahani**

**Spring 2015**

**TODD HALL 204**

**Tues, Thurs, 1.25-2.40**

**Office hours: Tues and Thurs 12-15 to 1.15 and by appointment**

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### Course Description

“Theoretical Issues in Queer Studies” proposes to engage with some of the uses of queer theory across various cultural, political and institutional contexts. The class will serve as an introduction to the works of the field’s major practitioners and will illuminate some of its central theoretical and political interventions—i.e. its recognition that the division between ‘public’ and ‘private’ is always a political one, that sexual practice is fundamentally linked to and regulated by institutions and ideologies, that binaries between hetero/homo, masculine/feminine, nature/nurture are informed by a heteronormative logic that requires deconstruction, and that “queer” can no longer reference sexual politics in isolation. The last point is especially crucial for the focus of this class in which our discussions will connect queer politics to issues as diverse as: Transgender (in)visibility, the recent events in Ferguson, wars in the Middle-East, the gentrification of neighborhoods, the occupation of Palestine, and the prison industrial complex.

While this class is obviously pre-occupied with what queer theory *says*, we will also attempt to grapple with what queer theory can actually *do*—in classrooms and universities, ideological and political conflicts, reformulations of disciplines and histories. Even though the class will be theoretical, and at times, meta-theoretical in its scope, we will engage in a practical and theoretical social reflection from a queer affirmative perspective. Thus we will ask questions of the following nature:

- 1) How can queer theoretical frameworks offer new and productive ways of understanding politics and sexual citizenship?
- 2) What are the performative effects of theorizing a notion of queer space and time?
- 2) How can queer theory provide us with critical tools to critically interrogate neoliberalism, militarization, and occupation?
- 3) In what ways are theorizations of queer utopia compatible with or critical of repronormative futurism?
- 4) What does queer theory have to say about the politics of “homonationalism” post- 9/11?
- 5) What are the intersections between queer theory and critical race theory?
- 6) What direction has the theorization of gender queerness and trans politics taken within queer studies?

This class does not attempt to provide easy solutions; instead we will try to articulate non-

programmatic, tentative and historically contingent responses to the relationship between queer theory and social change.

**Note:** Given the advanced level of this class (it is an upper division), a commitment to anti-sexist, anti-homophobic and anti-racist inquiry is taken as axiomatic. While a previous background in queer studies is not a requirement, such a commitment will be the default pedagogical setting for this semester.

### **Learning Outcomes**

- Students will acquire the theoretical tools and a conceptual vocabulary to critique heterosexual and cis-gendered privilege.
- Students will understand some of the central political debates in the field of queer theory.
- Students will understand the ways in which “sexuality” as an issue dovetails with various other social institutions such as media, religion, family, and education.
- Students will be able to write thesis driven and coherent research papers employing queer theoretical frameworks discussed throughout the semester

### **Required Texts**

1. Course Packet: Available at Cougar Copies (Referred to throughout the syllabus as CP)

Please bring your course packet to class **everyday**. If you do not have your course packet in front of you during class discussions, I reserve the right to mark you absent on that day. No other books are required for this class.

### **Films to be purchased/rented:**

2. *Valentine Road* – Martha Cunningham

**Assignments and Evaluation (Grading):** Your grade will be calculated, using a 1000 point scale, as follows: Reading Responses 10%; Quizzes 10%; Class participation 10%; Exam 10% Mid-term Paper (4-5 pages) 20%; Final Research Paper (7-8 pages) 40%. All work should be completed by the due dates in the syllabus. **No incompletes will be given in this course unless there are extraordinary circumstances and the student must be passing the class at the time the incomplete is requested.** Requests for incompletes must be made in writing (email ok) before the last class.

**Reading Response Folder/Blog (100pts/10%):** You will write brief responses (approx 1 paragraph or 250 words) to readings and films before the reading/discussion due date. I will begin each class by asking some of you to read out your response to the day’s readings. For your response, note down the main arguments of the essay, with one question or comment about the essay that engages with its implications or applications. Graduate students taking this class will be required to write weekly analytical response papers of approximately 2-3 pages.

**Pop Quizzes (100 pts/10%):** Surprise quizzes will be given at any point during the

semester to ensure you are doing the reading. **You cannot make up quizzes if you are absent or late to class.**

**Class Participation (100pts/10%):** Active participation in class discussions, group activities, and application exercises that are based on class readings and lectures is expected. Specific in-class group activities will be conducted throughout the semester; additionally, readings will be taught through class discussions (and not only lectures) in which you must participate. While I encourage difference of opinion (from the text under consideration, the instructor, or a point of view expressed by a classmate), I expect you to be respectful and civil. Any form of bigotry will not be tolerated. Please note that class participation does not only mean “talking” in class. You must engage with the text under consideration. If you are failing quizzes, you are obviously not reading the required materials. **Failing quizzes will drastically affect class participation points. If you fail 3 quizzes or more, you automatically lose 50 class participation points.** Sleeping, chatting with friends, reading a newspaper, eating, not submitting assignments on time, not preparing for class, will all result in low class participation points. I reserve the right to confront you about your conduct and participation in class. I also reserve the right to call on you to ask you your response to any of the readings that you have done for the day. You must come to class prepared with an insight or a question about the reading. I recognize that not everyone is confident speaking in front of a large number of people – there are various ways you can make up for this – emailing me questions before class, visiting my office hours to discuss materials one on one. Below is a break up of your class participation grade:

100-80 points: Excellent participation; Active and insightful contributions; Significantly enhances the classroom dynamic with questions, comments, and responses. Engages the text under consideration and does all the reading. **To get full points on class participation you should not fail any quizzes.**

79-60: Consistent participation with adequate insight into text. Good but somewhat basic contributions.

59-40: Rarely contributes but attentive and not disruptive in any way.

39-20: Indifferent, consistently failing quizzes, physically present but checked out of class.

19-0: Disruptive to classroom activities; use of cell phone/texting; disrespectful of professor and fellow students.

**Exam (100pts 10%):** The in class exam will be comprised of identification of key terms & concepts and essay type answers. It will cover information from the assigned readings, films excerpts, and material presented in class. You will receive all the questions for the exam two weeks prior to the exam date. **Graduate students will have an alternative assignment in place of the exam.**

**Teaching Presentation (100 pts 10%; for graduate students only):** You will be responsible for a teaching presentation for two classes of your choice. For your presentation, you will have to lead the discussion, explain key concepts and engage the class in a dialogue

about the reading. Please make sure you visit me a week before your presentations to go over your lesson plan.

**Mid-term Paper (200pts/20%) & Final Research Paper including In-class**

**Presentation (400 pts/40%):** There will be two major writing assignments for this course: a Mid-term Paper queer definitional analysis of an event, an object, or text (4-5 pages), which will require research, critical analysis and synthesis of reading material; and a Research Project (8-10 pages, with a one page Presentation) which will consist of an analysis and illustration of theoretical framework or topic we have discussed in class. **Even though we will spend two weeks on presentations, the entire class must be prepared to make presentations on April 14.** Handouts for all the assignment requirements with grading criterion will be given to you prior to the assignment. See course schedule below for due dates. **Graduate students can replace this assignment with one full-length 20-page semester that is due at the end of the semester.**

**Extra Credit Options:**

**WSU Women’s Transit Volunteering (50 pts):** You must complete all training and shift hours or no credit will be received.

**Exhibits, Panels, & Speakers (40pts):** Extra credit will be offered for a number of events that are relevant to our class this semester. They will be announced in class or you may inquire whether events of your choice might count for extra credit. Students not taking the Women’s Transit option can earn up to 40pts at 20 points per event. You must turn in a written summary and reaction to the event (minimum two pages, typed, double-spaced) in the class immediately following the event.

**Grading Scale:**

|          |    |         |    |           |    |
|----------|----|---------|----|-----------|----|
| 930-1000 | A  | 800-820 | B- | 670-690   | D+ |
| 900-920  | A- | 770-790 | C+ | 600-660   | D  |
| 870-890  | B+ | 740-760 | C  | Below 600 | F  |
| 830-860  | B  | 700-730 | C- |           |    |

**Course Policies**

**Attendance & Absences**

Attendance is compulsory. You are allowed a maximum of 3 personal absences and 1 absence for which you have university sanctioned documentation (given to me BEFORE you miss the class). For your 3 personal absences, I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences, so please use these absences for genuine emergencies. For every additional absence beyond this, your grade will drop. In other words, if your final class grade is B+ and you have 4 personal absences, your final grade will drop to B. You are responsible for any work you might have missed during your absences.

**Tardies**

If you are more than 5 minutes late to class, you will receive a tardy. Tardies will be calculated in accordance to the class watch, not yours. Three tardies will constitute an absence. I take attendance at the very beginning of class. If you come to class late and miss attendance, it is your responsibility to come up to me after class and inform me that you

were present. I will change the absence into a tardy, but you are allowed to do this only two times during the semester. If you miss a quiz because you are late, you will not be able to make up the quiz, and will not receive any points for it. In general, you are requested to be very mindful of time—entering class late is a distraction to the instructor as well as to your peers. Arriving more than 15 minutes will count as an absence. The same rules apply to leaving early. So if for any reason you need to leave early, let me know at the beginning of class, but keep in mind that “tardy” rules still apply. In other words, leaving 10 minutes early will give you two tardies. If you need to leave 20 minutes early, you will not be marked as present on that day.

### **Disability Accommodation**

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please either visit or call the Access Center (Washington Building 217; 509-335-3417) to schedule an appointment with an Access Advisor. All accommodations MUST be approved through the Access Center.

### **Technology and Academic Etiquette**

\* **Students must turn off all phones and electronic gadgets during class.** (Your cell phone is not considered “off” when it is on vibrate). If a student's cellular phone rings during class hours, she/he will be penalized with an absence. Cell phones must not be placed on your desks or in front of you during class. In other words, anything that beeps, vibrates, flashes... (you get the point) must be turned off during class hours.

\* Please do not begin to pack your things at the end of class before I have let the class go. I will never keep you beyond the class time, but I expect this common courtesy.

\* **If I catch you texting or using any electronic device during class hours, (this includes during film screenings), you will be marked absent. I may also ask you to leave the class.**

\* Please do not use your cell phone even to look at the time.

\* Please do not use laptops during class hours. If you wish to use your laptop to take notes, you must take special permission from me and always sit in the front row.

\* If you miss class, I cannot go over the lecture/discussion over with you during my office hours, nor can I provide you with notes. Please ask one of your classmates to share their notes or update you about any important announcements or deadlines you might have missed.

\* While healthy disagreement and difference in opinion is expected and encouraged, I do expect that discussions should be conducted in a respectful and civil manner. If I interpret any of your comments as verbal harassment, I will ask you to leave the class.

\* If you want feedback on your writing or class performance, please visit my office hours or make an appointment to see me. **I do not give feedback on your papers via email. All email correspondence must be limited to questions for which I can give you a quick response.**

\* Unless specified by me, all your assignments must be turned in as hard copies. Electronic submissions or attachments via email are not acceptable. Visit my office hours for feedback on assignments.

\* **Please do not get up and leave the class during class hours unless it's a genuine emergency since this distracts your classmates and the instructor.**

\* Do not use class hours as breakfast/lunch time. You must not be eating during class

hours.

\* If I see you engaged in any activity that does not pertain to classroom pre-occupations (reading newspapers, doing homework for another class) I reserve the right to give you an absence for that day even though you are technically present in class.

\* If I interpret any of your behavior to be disruptive, unprofessional, or rude, I reserve the right to ask you to leave the class (which will then be counted towards your absences)

\* **Please maintain appropriate email etiquette** when communicating with me (or any instructor). All emails should have apposite greetings (It is not appropriate to email instructors with “Hey” “Hi there,” or with no greeting at all). Similarly, use appropriate communication when signing off. Most professional etiquette guides recommend “Sincerely.” Please do not email for information you will find on the syllabus or in hand outs that I give you in class.

### **Academic Integrity**

Washington State University’s Student Handbook on Academic Dishonesty provides specific definitions (WAC 504-26-010) of “dishonesty” and “cheating,”

(<http://conduct.wsu.edu/default.asp?PageID=338>). Cheating includes, “submitting a false excuse for absence or tardiness or a false explanation for failing to complete a class requirement or scheduled examination at the appointed date and time.” Plagiarism, a form of cheating, is “presenting the information, ideas, or phrasing of another person as the student’s own work without proper acknowledgement of the source. This includes submitting a commercially prepared paper or research project or submitting for academic credit any work done by someone else.” At the least, students guilty of cheating in this course will receive a zero for the work in question, but the consequence of cheating may include failure of the course. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the University’s definitions and policies on Academic Integrity to understand your rights and responsibilities.

(<http://academicintegrity.wsu.edu/>).

### **Campus Safety Information**

WSU has made an **emergency notification system** available for faculty, students and staff. Please register at myWSU with emergency contact information (cell, email, text, etc). You may have been prompted to complete emergency contact information when registering for classes. Please refer to the University emergency management website

<http://oem.wsu.edu/emergencies> as well WSU ALERT <http://alert.wsu.edu> for information on WSU’s communication resources WSU will use to provide warning and notification for emergencies. The entire WSU safety plan can be found at <http://safetyplan.wsu.edu>.

### **Course Schedule**

Note: You are expected to have read the assignments *by* the date indicated on the schedule. Come to class prepared with commentary and notes for the day’s reading. I reserve the right to make changes, which I will announce in advance. All readings (with the exception of the films and *Zami*) are in the Course Packet.

### **Week 1: Introductions**

Tues Jan 13 – Intros

Thurs Jan 15 – Syllabus

## **Week 2: Defining Terms**

Tues Jan 20 – Introductory lecture

Thurs Jan 22 – Siobhan Sommerville, “Queer” from *Keywords* in CP; Cathy Cohen podcast: <http://videostreaming.gc.cuny.edu/videos/video/2494/in/channel/37/> (Please listen in its entirety and come to class prepared for discussion)

## **Week 3: Queer Methods**

Tues Jan 27 – Eve Sedgwick, Selections from *Epistemology of the Closet* in CP

Thurs Jan 29 – Michael Foucault, Selections from *History of Sexuality Vol. 1* in CP

## **Week 4: Queer Space and Time**

Tues Feb 3 – J Halberstam, “Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies” from *In a Queer Time and Place* in CP

Thur Feb 5 – Michael Warner, “Zoning out Sex” from *The Trouble with Normal* in CP

## **Week 5: Space and Time Contd.**

Tues Feb 10 – Sarah Schulman, Selections from *Gentrification of the Mind* in CP

Thurs Feb 12 – Martin Manalansan, “Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City” (Journal Article from *Social Text*, 2005) in CP

## **Week 6: Queer Media**

Tuesday Feb 17 – Alexander Juhasz, “Video Remains” (Journal Article from *GLQ*, 2006) in CP and discussion of *The Watermelon Woman*

Thurs Feb 19 – J Halberstam, “The Transgender Look” from *In a Queer Time and Place* in CP

## **Week 7: Queer Politics in Homonationalist Times**

Tues Feb 24 – Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: the War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots” (Journal Article from *Social Text*, 2002) in CP

Thurs Feb 26 – Dean Spade and Craig Willse, “Sex, Gender, and War in an Age of Multicultural Imperialism” (Journal Article from *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 2014) in CP

## **Week 8: Queer Necropolitics**

Tues March 3 – Jason Ritchie, “Black Skin Splits: the Birth (and Death) of the Queer Palestinian” from *Queer Necropolitics* in CP

Thurs March 5 – Sarah Lamble, “Queer Investments in Punitiveness: Sexual Citizenship, Social Movements and the Expanding Carceral State” from *Queer Necropolitics* in CP

## **Week 9: Queer Critiques of Neoliberalism**

Tues March 10 – Lisa Duggan, “Equality Inc” from *The Twilight of Equality* in CP

Thurs March 12 – Robert McCruer, “Capitalism and Disabled Identity” from *Crip Theory* in CP

**Week 10: Spring Break**

Tues March 17 – No class

Thurs March 19– No class

**Week 11: Queer Negativity, Queer Utopia**

March 24 Tues – Lee Edelman, “The Future is Kid Stuff” from *No Future* AND Jose Munoz, “Feeling Utopia” from *Cruising Utopia* from CP

March 26 Thurs -- Kathryn Bond Stockton, “Growing Sideways, or Why Children Appear to Get Queerer in the Twentieth Century” from *The Queer Child* AND Eve Sedgwick, “How to Bring up your Kids Gay” from *Fear of a Queer Planet* from CP

**Week 12:**

March 31 Exam

April 2 Exam

Homework assignment: Watch *Valentine Road*

**Week 14:**

April 7 Tues – Gayle Salamon, Selections from *Assuming a Body* from CP and Discussion of *Valentine Road*

April 9 Thurs – Thesis Topic Workshop

**Week 15: Queer Semiotics**

April 14 Tues – Tennessee Williams, “Hard Candy” and Ismat Chughtai, “The Quilt” from CP

April 16 Thurs -- Presentations

**Week 16**

April 21 Tues –Presentations

April 23 Thurs—Presentations

**Week 17: Dead Week: NO CLASS**

April 28 Tues – Final Papers due