

# QUEER THEORIES / ACTIVIST PRACTICES

GWS 116 A/C, Fall 2011

Class: Wed: 9-12 602 Barrows; Office Hours Tuesday 9-11 622 Barrows

Professor: Juana María Rodríguez

Graduate Student Instructor: Margaret Rhee

Undergraduate Class Intern: Marco Flores

This class will examine various forms of activist practices and create possibilities for students to participate in community projects that allow them to explore their own definitions of activism, community engagement, and social transformation. As a class, we will consider different types of interventions—art, law, advocacy, and direct action—and examine the limits and possibilities of these different forms of social engagement. In the process, we will pay particular attention to how narratives of queer identity, community, social and sexual practices are mutually constituted through understandings of race, ethnicity, age, class, gender presentation and identity, language, region, religion, ability, citizenship, and history. Course materials will include a variety of texts including films, short stories, personal essays, law review articles, academic articles and guest lectures by local artists and activists. As a class, we will pay particular attention to how issues of representation, various sorts of privilege and access, and the ethics of engaging human subjects inform our activist and scholarly practices.

In lieu of a weekly discussion section, each student is expected to spend 14 hours over the course of the semester working with one of four Community Partners as a community intern. The four projects are:

- **Queer Women of Color Media Arts Project (QWOCMAP):** A media arts project dedicated to producing and disseminating works by queer women of color. This group is also responsible for hosting the annual Queer Women of Color Film Festival in San Francisco, now in its seventh year.
- **Lesbian of Color Archive Project:** This visual archive project consists of working with African-American photographer and archivist, Lenn Keller, to compile and catalog photographs and ephemera documenting the presence and activism of lesbians and dykes of color in the San Francisco Bay Area.
- **The Global Forum on MSM & HIV:** This organization is dedicated to working worldwide against HIV for the health and human rights of men who have sex with men and transgender and gender non-conforming populations.
- **Proyecto ContraSIDA por Vida/Ethnic Studies Library Archive Project:** This project will assist the Ethnic Studies Library catalog and archive the papers of *Proyecto ContraSIDA por Vida*, a Latin@ HIV prevention agency in San Francisco which received considerable attention from scholars due to its imaginative and groundbreaking approach to community health.

## Required Books:

- *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault
- Course Reader available at Copy Central, 2560 Bancroft Way. 510-848-8649, [muji@copycentral.com](mailto:muji@copycentral.com)

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

**Critical Thinking:** Identify and evaluate arguments, rhetorical and aesthetic styles; synthesize ideas, and develop well-substantiated, coherent, and concise arguments.

**Intersectionality:** Analyze sexuality as it intersects with other relations of power, such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, religion, geography, ability, and age; distinguish universalist understandings of gender and sexuality from multi-dimensional analyses that recognize interconnectivity and mutual constitution of categories.

**Creativity:** Bring together a variety of texts, ideas, theoretical, political, empirical, aesthetic and rhetorical approaches in order to respond imaginatively to social, political and intellectual issues.

**Collaboration:** Work collectively, take initiative, offer and receive constructive criticism, exchange ideas and creatively work together toward a common endeavor.

**Communication:** Evaluate, interpret, and generate information from a variety of sources, including print and electronic media, film and video. Express ideas effectively, both verbally and in written form.

**Engaged Practices:** Learn to link theory to practice. Learn how to be an effective and ethically informed advocate informed by transnational, political, socio-cultural, and philosophical contexts.

**Critical self-awareness:** Demonstrate self-reflexivity about one's ideas and social and political position.

### COURSE POLICIES

**Course Content:** This course takes as central themes questions of sexual expression and sexuality. Students will be required to read, see, and discuss materials that explicitly address these issues. If students are uncomfortable with frank discussions of bodies, gender identities, or sexual practices, this class may be inappropriate. All texts and film screenings are required.

**Accommodations:** I want all students to perform at their very best. Students requiring any form of academic accommodations should contact DSP <http://dsp.berkeley.edu/services.html> to request appropriate accommodations. Students who prefer to be referred to by a name or gender that is not reflected on the official university roster should feel free to contact me.

**Paper Format:** This is an upper-division class and I expect all written work to meet appropriate academic standards of scholarly writing. All papers should be typed, double spaced and use standard margins. Papers must include all sources cited and conform to MLA guidelines. Students are responsible for keeping copies of all of their work. Emailing yourself drafts of your work in progress is strongly advised to prevent work being lost due to computer problems.

**Late Papers:** 3 points will be deducted if the assignment is handed in within 48 hours (B+ → B; C → C-), 10 points if handed in within a week (A → B; C → D+). No late papers will be accepted after a week. If a doctor's note or other documentation is submitted, there will be no penalty. All students must upload their papers onto B-Space to ensure a time stamp.

**Plagiarism** is not tolerated in this class. Plagiarism includes representing someone else's work as your own. This includes handing in another student's paper and using the words and/or ideas from a publication, the web or other source without citation. Always cite your sources: both direct quotes and paraphrased ideas. Students in this class are expected to produce original work for this class: you can not submit a paper you have already submitted for another class or use the same paper for two classes without explicit permission from both professors. Plagiarism violates the Academic Conduct and can result in Academic Suspension or Dismissal.

**Commitment to Collaboration and Accountability:** A central feature of this class is collaboration with both community partners and with other class members. Students need to be able to work in a respectful and professional manner with others at all times regardless of personal or ideological differences. In this class, students are accountable to, not only the Professor, but to community members and each other.

**B-Space:** I will regularly post materials to our course website; check it frequently.

**Email:** Emails will be answered within 72 hours, please plan accordingly.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Class Attendance and Participation.** All students should be invested in advancing the direction of their own intellectual formation and dedicated to the contribution of a dynamic and challenging space of mutual learning. Students are expected to come to class having read the assigned materials, having carefully considered the texts, and prepared to add to the collective dialogue on which this class is based. Several short in-class writing assignments will also contribute to this portion of the grade. 5% (Individual Grade)

**Community Collaboration:** In lieu of a weekly discussion section, each student is expected to spend 14 hours over the course of the semester working with one of the four Community partners. Each student will prepare a Memo of Understanding (MOU) with their Community Partner that outlines what their mutual goals and objectives for the semester. MOU should be as specific as possible, outlining schedules, deadlines, tasks, progress reports, etc. Mid-semester students will hand in a 1-2 page report on their progress, and adjust their MOUs if needed. The final report will detail the accomplishments of the semester along with any challenges. This final report will be shared with their Community Partners. Finally, each group will present a 15 minute presentation on their work to the class that highlights the work of the organization, as well as the theoretical issues that emerge through collaboration. 25% (Individual Grade)

### **Annotated Bibliography:**

Each group working at an internship site will compile a collective annotated bibliography of at least 25 sources related to their community collaboration. These can include academic articles, book chapters, review articles, policy reports, resource websites, or anything else related to the subject. The assignment will be graded based on the quality of the sources cited and the accuracy and insight demonstrated by the annotations. 10% (Group Grade)

**Blogs:** As a class we will create a private, internal blog that will serve as our collective journal of the class experience, this will not be shared with our community partners. This is a space where we can discuss the dynamics of community work, exchange advice on specific issues that might arise with our community partners, make connections between our readings and our lived experiences; share news and media that relates to the multiple intersecting themes of the class. 10% (Individual Grade)

**Writing Assignments and Reading Summaries:** Students will be required to turn in 5 short papers (1000 words) that reflect their critical reading and reflection of assigned texts. The first paper will be peer-reviewed, and resubmitted. Students are also responsible for peer-reviewing one essay. The papers will be graded on the basis of: 1) evidence of substantive comprehension of critical ideas; 2) ability to make generative connections across texts and ideas; 3) critical analysis of the themes presented; 4) sophistication and clarity of written expression. 50% (Individual Grade)

**Extra-Credit Creative Design Project:** Students working in groups or individually will design and create a poster, placard, button, t-shirt, bumper sticker, puppet or banner suitable for display or distribution at a political rally or event. This assignment requires students to condense a theoretically charged message into a short text and/or visually striking image in order to produce a material object whose life will exceed the duration of this class. (Worth up to 5%)

## SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

### KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS

These readings will begin to give us a common understanding of key terms including community, liberation, queer, experience, and perversity, along with others. We will use these discussions to reflect on the importance of language and interpretation.

#### Week 1

Introduction to class policies, requirements and themes

"What We Want, What We Believe," Third World Gay Revolution

Selected Keywords from *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*

#### Week 2

"The Evidence of Experience," Joan Scott

"Aversion/Perversion/Diversion," Samuel Delany.

### BEYOND HERE AND NOW

These readings ask us to think beyond our present moment of queerness to imagine how other histories, locations, positions, and languages disrupt our contemporary understandings of queer. How are our ways of knowing and our political practices shaped by our location and possibilities? What kinds of discourses shape what we know about gendered bodies and the cultural contexts in which they live? How is knowledge about sex, gender, sexuality and embodied difference produced and how does it circulate?

#### Week 3

"Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," Gayle Rubin.

"In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma," Martin F. Manalansan IV

"They Like You 'Cause You Eat Dog, So What are You Gonna Do About It?," R. Zamora-Linmark

"Notes towards a Theory of Anomaly," Daniel Heath Justice

### SEX, POWER, DISCOURSE

Together, we will read, discuss and demystify this classic text to examine the way it articulates ideas of sexuality, power, discourse and their interconnection and to consider its relevance for current local situations. (All students are required to turn in a writing summary this week).

#### Week 4

*History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault

### INTERVENTIONS

Focusing on case studies of activist organizations and activist artists, this section will consider how different political practices of engagement are shaped in order to explore the possibilities and limitations of various strategic interventions. In the process, we will also examine different histories of social activism that inform the current political climate. What possibilities of representation exist in law, autobiography, art and documentary as genres of social activism? How do ideas like vulnerability, desire, and memory shape practices of community engagement? What are the state's investments in managing activist desires, and how are we implicated in these projects of cooptation, domestication and accommodation?

### **Week 5**

"Marginality and the Landscape of Erotic Alien(n)ations," Gordon Brent Ingram

"AIDS Activism and Public Feelings: Documenting ACT Ups Lesbians," by Ann Cvetkovich

"Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics," Cathy Cohen

### **Week 6**

"Activism and Identity in the Ruins of Representation," Juana María Rodríguez

"The Non-profit Industrial Complex and Trans Resistance," Rickke Mananzala and Dean Spade

"Activist Latina Lesbian Publishing: esto no tiene nombre and conmocion," tatiana de la tierra

FILM: *Sabrosura*

### **NATIONAL LONGINGS/GLOBAL BELONGINGS**

Looking at issues of political asylum, international human rights discourse, and the politics of citizenship in the United States, this section examines how national subjects are defined through race, gender, sexuality and other forms of difference, and how the state produces and disciplines subjects who deviate from national norms. In the process we will investigate how are ideas of exile, displacement, migration, and national belonging are informed by sexuality, and how is sexuality informed by cultural and national projects of inclusion and exclusion? In addition, we will examine how the politics of citizenship travels across borders and spaces, through virtual, digital, and technological possibilities. What acts of translation occur in the process as bodies and ideas move across literal, metaphoric, and imaginary borders?

### **Week 7**

"Local Sites/Global Contexts: The Transnational Trajectories of Fire and 'The Quilt,'" Gayatri Gopinath

"Getting F\*\*\*\*\*d in Puerto Rico: Metaphoric Provocations and Queer Activist Interventions," Juana María Rodríguez

### **Week 8**

"Abu Ghraib and U.S. Sexual Exceptionalism," Jasbir Puar

"Introduction," *Against the Romance of Community*, Miranda Joseph

"Online Profiles: Remediating the Coming Out Story," Mary L. Gray

*Brandon* by Shu Lea Chaeng: <http://brandon.guggenheim.org>

"It Gets Better," selected videos

### **IMAGINING JUSTICE**

Touching on a wide range of issues from the human rights of transgender prisoners, to racial profiling after 9/11, these readings document how individuals and groups reach for the possibility of justice. Whether on an intimate level, or on an international scale, these texts also expose us to the political and ethical risks involved in projects of activist interventions. What expectations do we bring to law and social justice movements? How are ideas of freedom, equality, and democracy deployed in the service of political ideologies of transnational trade, neo-liberalism, and US exceptionalism? How can, and how do, activists and practitioners respond ethically to suffering, violence, and injustice?

**Week 9**

"Resisting Medicine, Re/modeling Gender," Dean Spade

"Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality," Judith Butler

FILM: *Cruel and Unusual*

**Week 10**

"Messages of Exclusion: Gender, Movements, and Symbolic Boundaries," Joshua Gamson

"Equality, Inc.," Lisa Duggan

Video: *Beyond Marriage and the Military, Queer Politics for the 21st Century*

**Week 11**

"Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terror and the Production of Docile Patriots," Jasbir Puar and Amit. S. Rai

"Policing Privacy, Migrants, and the Limits of Freedom," Nayan Shah

**EMBODIED RESISTANCE**

These essays look at a variety of social forms such as dancing, cruising, karaoke and softball to image what sorts of resistances and strategies for survival these everyday practices might contain. In the process, they point to how communities of color, and the everyday queer practices in which they engage, often fall outside the sightlines of mainstream gay and lesbian cultures. These essays also point us to consider ideas how affect, or queer feelings, informs our understanding of activism, resistance and resilience in the face of social violence and illegibility.

**Week 12**

"Queerness as Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism," Jose Esteban Muñoz

"For the Children: Dancing the Beloved Community," Jafari Allen

"The Light That Never Goes Out: Butch Intimacies and Sub-Urban Socialities in "Lesser Los Angeles," Karen Tongson

**Week 13**

Class Presentations

**Week 14**

Class Presentations

**Week 15**

Review Period