

Topics in Advanced Performance Studies: Gender and Sexuality

Prof. Robin Bernstein

Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality (SWGS) 1433
Harvard University
Fall 2011, Wednesdays 1-3 pm, Sever Hall 204

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This course takes students to the cutting edge of queer theory and performance studies. We engage with three themes that are currently under urgent debate in queer theory: antisociality and utopia, affect and touch, and history and time. As we explore these themes, we ask, where are queer theory and performance studies intersecting—and not? Where and how can we bring them together? What happens when we do so? How might queer theory and performance studies productively challenge each other? Our goal is to form an interpretive community to wrestle with texts that are utterly current—texts whose meanings and implications have not yet been sedimented through repeated acts of reading. Thus we join with reading communities near and far that are also grappling with these recent texts; and we participate in the global project of theorizing queerness and performance.

Assignments and requirements:

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| Thoughtful, engaged, and respectful classroom participation | 25% |
| Performance Exercises (two exercises, 15% each; various dates) | 30% |
| Mid-semester Paper, due Monday, October 3 | 10% |
| Proposal for Final Project, due November 9 (graded full credit/no credit) | 5% |
| Final Project, due Monday, December 12 | 30% |

Performance Exercise:

In this exercise, you will place our reading in direct conversation with a performance. Students will work in teams of two to bring into the classroom a performance—live or mediated—that relates in some complex way to one or more of the week's reading assignments. For example, the team might screen a brief film clip, YouTube video, television commercial, or music video; or a team might stage a live performance in the classroom. The team will contextualize the performance for the class and will suggest ways in which the week's reading and the performance might inform or challenge each other. *The performance should not merely exemplify some point in the reading, nor should the performance be one that the assigned reading analyzes in depth.* The performance **and** initial contextualizing remarks should run between **10 and 15 minutes total**. Please do not exceed this limit. After the contextualizing comments and the performance, the team will facilitate the class's discussion of the performance in relation to the week's reading. Each student will complete two performance exercises and will work with a different partner each time.

Mid-Semester Paper:

Each student will write a 5-7 page paper that will accomplish EITHER of the following: a) critically engage with one or two assigned texts (for example, critique an argument, read one argument against or through another, etc.) OR b) use the ideas in one of our assigned reading to analyze a brief performance (e.g., one scene in a film, play, or television show; a short video; or a brief interaction in everyday life). Each paper must have a clear thesis and must support that thesis with thoughtfully-chosen evidence from the text and/or performance. No outside research is necessary or desirable. With the professor's permission, a graduate student may complete this assignment by writing a publishable book review.

Final Project:

Each student will complete a substantial final project that engages deeply with the concepts in this course. An undergraduate student may write a 15-page paper or may propose an alternative form of engagement (the professor will work with students to craft viable alternative projects but ultimately reserves the right to decline any proposal). A graduate student's final project must consist of a 20-25 page scholarly paper. Each student must submit a proposal for a final project—regardless of form—on November 9.

General information:

Late assignments will be docked one third of a letter grade for each day or partial day overdue. Please note that failure to complete any assignment can lower your final grade in excess of the stated percentage.

If you need reasonable accommodations for a disability, please let Professor Bernstein know as soon as possible.

Professor Bernstein holds office hours from 9-10:30 am on Wednesdays. You are welcome to drop in, but students with appointments receive priority. You may reserve time online at <http://wgs.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k53419&pageid=icb.page449095>. If you have class during office hours, please email Professor Bernstein at <rbernst@fas> to make alternative arrangements.

SCHEDULE

August 31. NO CLASS—Harvard runs on “Monday” schedule

September 7. Welcome and introductions

September 14. Foundations in Queer Theory and Performance Studies

- E. Patrick Johnson, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from my Grandmother,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* Vol. 21, no. 1 (January 2001), 1-25. Access online through Hollis.
- Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Introduction,” *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (hereafter “Sedgwick”), pp. 1-25
- Janet Halley and Andrew Parker, “Introduction,” *After Sex? Writing Since Queer Theory* (hereafter “Halley and Parker”), 1-14
- RECOMMENDED: Sharon Marcus, “Queer Theory for Everyone: A Review Essay,” *Signs* Vol. 31, no. 1 (2005), 191-218. Access online through Hollis.
- RECOMMENDED: “A Student’s Guide to Performance Studies”
<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic235750.files/Performance_Studies.pdf>.

First Theme: Antisociality and Utopia

September 21. Antisociality

- Robert L. Caserio, Lee Edelman, Judith Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and Tim Dean, "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory," *PMLA* Vol. 121, no. 3 (May 2006), 819-828. Access online through Hollis.
- Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *October* vol. 43 (Winter 1987), 197-222. Access online through JSTOR.
- Leo Bersani, "Shame on You," in Halley and Parker, 91-109
- Lee Edelman, "Ever After: History, Negativity, and the Social," in Halley and Parker, 110-118

September 28. Utopia

- José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (hereafter "Muñoz"). Read all EXCEPT chapters 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9
- Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You," in Sedgwick, 123-151
- RECOMMENDED: Jill Dolan, "Introduction: Feeling the Potential of Elsewhere," in Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*

MONDAY, OCTOBER 3, 3PM: MID-SEMESTER PAPER DUE to Professor Bernstein's mailbox in WGS (Boylston Hall, ground floor)

Second Theme: Affect and Touch

October 5. Affect

- Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (hereafter "Cvetkovich"), "Introduction" and chapter 1, 1-48
- Ann Cvetkovich, "Public Feelings," in Halley and Parker, 169-179
- Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick with Adam Frank, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading with Silvan Tomkins," in Sedgwick, 93-121
- José Esteban Muñoz, "Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho's "The Sweetest Hangover (And Other STDs)," *Theatre Journal* vol. 52, no. 1 (March 2000), 67-79. Access online through Hollis.

October 13. Shame: A Queerly Performative Affect?

- David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, eds. *Gay Shame*. Read pp. 3-110, 176-177, 196-200, 277-296, 339-368
- Hiram Perez, "You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It, Too!" *Social Text* 84-85 (Fall-Winter 2005), 171-191. Access online through Hollis.
- Judith Halberstam, "Shame and White Gay Masculinity." *Social Text* 84-85 (Fall-Winter 2005), 219-233. Access online through Hollis.
- Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, "Gay Shame, Latina- and Latino-Style: A Critique of White Queer Performativity," in Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez, eds., *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*, pp. 55-80 (sourcebook)

October 19. Touching

- REVIEW Sedgwick, "Introduction," in *Touching Feeling*.
- Renu Bora, "Outing Texture," in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ed., *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, 94-127 (sourcebook)

- Kathryn Bond Stockton, "Cloth Wounds, Or When Queers are Martyred to Clothes: Debasements of a Fabricated Skin," in Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where "Black" Meets "Queer,"* pp. 39-66 (sourcebook)
- Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, pp. 1-40 (sourcebook)
- Jasbir Puar, "Prognosis Time: Towards a Geopolitics of Debility, Capacity, and Affect," *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 19.2 (July 2009), 161-172. Access online through Hollis.
- Cvetkovich, chapter 2, epilogue

October 26. Feeling

- Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*
- Joseph Roach, "Performance: The Blunders of Orpheus," *PMLA* 125.4 (2010), 1978-1086. Access online through Hollis.

November 2. Orienting

- Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations: Objects, Others*
- RECOMMENDED: Robin Bernstein, "Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race," *Social Text* no. 101 (Winter 2009), 67-94

November 9. Moving

- In-class lecture; no new reading this week.
- Re-read two or three texts that you found difficult the first time around
- Get a head start on next week's reading
- **Proposal for final project due at the beginning of class**

Third Theme: History and Time

November 16. History

- Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval, Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Post-Modern*, "Introduction: Touching the Past," pp. 1-54 (sourcebook)
- Responses to *Getting Medieval* by Elizabeth A. Caswcelli, Rosemary Drage Hale, Amy Hollywood, Mark D. Jordan, Ann Pellegrini, Angela Zito, and Carolyn Dinshaw in *The Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10.2 (2001), pp. 165-212. Online through JSTOR
- Muñoz, chapter 4
- Tavia Nyong'o, "Brown Punk: Kalup Linzy's Musical Anticipations," *TDR: The Drama Review* 54.3 (Fall 2010), 71-86. Access online through Hollis.
- Cvetkovich, chapters 5, 7

November 23—THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS

November 30. Time

- Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*
- Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher Nealon, Nguyen Tan Hoang, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities," *GLQ* vol. 13, no. 2 (2007) 177-195
- RECOMMENDED: Elizabeth Freeman, "Still After," in Halley and Parker, 27-33

Additional class meeting to be scheduled: Presentations of Final Projects

Monday, December 12, 3PM: FINAL PROJECT DUE to Professor Bernstein's mailbox in WGS (Boylston Hall, ground floor)