Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender Studies Program

Fall 2014 Courses

LGBT 2350  Literature and Medicine: The Science and Fiction of Disease
MWF 12:20-1:10  E. Cohn

How does literary language depict the experience of physical suffering? Can a poem or a novel palliate pain, illness, even the possibility of death? From darkly comic narratives of black plague and accounts of early modern melancholy to nineteenth century discourses of sex to twentieth century critiques of mental institutions and depictions of the AIDS crisis, this course examines literature centered on medical practices from the early modern period through the twentieth century. How have medical practices changed, and when do these changes have political implications? Readings will include a broad range of genres, including poetry (Keats, Coleridge, Whitman), fiction (Stevenson, Shelley, Gilman, Kafka), theater (Kushner), nonfiction prose (Defoe, Woolf), and critical theory (Scarry, Lacqueur, Foucault, Derrida, Sontag).

LGBT 2780  Body as Text: Pleasure and Danger
TR 11:40-12:55  M. Raskolnikov

We experience our bodies as so much a part of who we are that we take them for granted. Yet the way we think about the body has a history of its own. This course looks at how the idea of “the body” gets constructed over time. How has the body come to have attributes called “gender,” “sexuality,” and “race”? Why have some bodies been seen as monstrous, perverted, and unholy, others as gorgeous, normal, and divine? What makes bodies pleasurable and dangerous? We’ll find out by examining a broad range of evidence from the ancient era to the present day, including literature (Ovid, Kafka, Octavia Butler), philosophy (Plato, Descartes, Judith Butler), film (Freaks, Hedwig and the Angry Inch), and the history of science.

LGBT 3331  Gender & Sexuality in Southeast Asian Cinema
TR 10:10-11:25  A. Fuhrman

This course examines the new cinemas of Southeast Asia and their engagement with contemporary discourses of gender and sexuality. It pays special attention to the ways in which sexuality and gendered embodiment are at present linked to citizenship and to other forms of belonging. Focusing on globally circulating Southeast Asian films of the past 15 years, the course draws on current writings from feminism, Buddhist studies, affect theory, queer studies, postcolonial theory, and film studies to ask what new understandings of subjectivity might emerge from these cinemas and their political contexts. Films will be drawn from both mainstream and independent cinema and will include the work of directors such as Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Danny and Oxide Pang, Nguyen Tan Hoang, Yau Ching, Thunska Pansittivorakul, Garin Nugroho, and Jean-Jacques Annaud.

LGBT 3550  Decadence
MW 7:30-8:45  E. Hanson

“My existence is a scandal,” Oscar Wilde once wrote, summing up in an epigram the effect of his carefully cultivated style of perversity and paradox. Through their valorization of aestheticism and all that was considered artificial, unnatural, or perverse, the so-called “Decadent” writers of the late-nineteenth century sought to free the pleasures of beauty, spirituality, and sexual desire from their more conventional ethical moorings. We will discuss literary and visual texts by Charles Baudelaire, Edgar Allan Poe, J.-K. Huysmans, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, A. C. Swinburne, Walter Pater, Renée Vivien, James McNeill Whistler, and Aubrey Beardsley, with a particular focus on Oscar Wilde. Students may read French and German texts in the original or in English translation.
In A Theory of Parody, Linda Hutcheon defines parody broadly as “repetition with critical difference, which marks difference rather than similarity.” Taking a cue from Hutcheon, we will consider parody as a form of meaning making that is not necessarily used in the service of ridicule. Rather, we will examine a number of late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century imitative works in order to distinguish the rich variety of political agendas and aesthetic rationales for recent parody. An emphasis on postmodern or contemporary performances and media that renovate images, ideas, and icons from modernism and modernity will unite our otherwise diverse efforts. Some of these efforts will also highlight what happens when an artist takes up a work made for one platform (for example, theatre, performance art, installation, cinema, television, the Web) and parodies it in another. Creators and works under consideration may range from Christopher Durang, Split Britches, and Pig Iron Theatre Company to The Simpsons, Cookie’s Fortune, and Strindberg and Helium. (HTC)

This course traces the genealogies and animating debates in black queer studies. Attentive to the relationship between black feminist criticism and black queer theory, this class proceeds with an understanding of gender and sexuality as intrinsic to the study of blackness in global contexts. Readings will include essays and books from Audre Lorde, E. Patrick Johnson, Christina Sharpe, Robert Reid Pharr, and others. Students will also engage popular cultural texts, such as films, music videos, and novels to address the conjecture of blackness and sexuality in critical and vernacular discourse.

The course examines how postcolonial African writers and filmmakers engage with and revise controversial images of bodies and sexuality—genital cursing, same-sex desire, HIV/AIDS, genital surgeries, etc. Our inquiry also surveys African theorists' troubling of problematic tropes and practices such as the conception in 19th-century racist writings of the colonized as embodiment, the pathologization and hypersexualization of colonized bodies, and the precarious and yet empowering nature of the body and sexuality in the postcolonial African experience. As we focus on African artists and theorists, we also read American and European theorists, including but not certainly limited to Giorgio Agamben, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Joseph Slaughter, detecting the ways in which discourses around bodies in the African context may shape contemporary theories and vice versa.

“Nature is a setting that equally well befits a comic or a mourning piece.”
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature (1836)

In what mood do we encounter “nature”? This seminar inflects this question in two ways, asking both how “we” feel in relation to non-human environments, and whether, and how, the non-human can be said to feel. We will consider the productive points of intersection between theories of affect, emotion, and sexuality, especially as they have been taken up in recent queer and feminist thought, and the diffuse wave of critical and cultural developments that has come to be called the “nonhuman turn.” We will examine the divergent threads contributing to the contemporary critical focus on the nonhuman, exploring their attention to the agential, sensory and cognitive capacities of the non-human, their reconfiguration of the relations between human and nonhuman worlds, and the more flexible and nuanced accounts of “nature” and “environments” that they make possible. We will critically examine the relationship between this body of thought and the emphasis on embodiment, feeling, and sensation in recent feminist and queer thought. At the same time, we will examine how the radically expanded ethos of being-in-common proposed by the non-human turn operates alongside the structures and histories of dehumanization to which and feminist, queer and critical race theory have drawn our
This course will approach the theme of “sensation” through questions of method, focusing in particular on the interdisciplinary challenges of documenting and archiving sensation. Foundational for this inquiry will be theories of the archive from both queer studies and postcolonial studies, including critiques of the archive as impossible or politically suspect, as well as efforts to transform archival and documentary practice in order to represent feeling and sensation. We will explore the challenges presented by “extreme” states, such as trauma, and ordinary or everyday experience, both of which inspire critiques of affective modes such as sentimentality and melodrama as well as traditional modes of realism.

This course examines the new cinemas of Southeast Asia and their engagement with contemporary discourses of gender and sexuality. It pays special attention to the ways in which sexuality and gendered embodiment are at present linked to citizenship and to other forms of belonging. Focusing on globally circulating Southeast Asian films of the past 15 years, the course draws on current writings from feminism, Buddhist studies, affect theory, queer studies, postcolonial theory, and film studies to ask what new understandings of subjectivity might emerge from these cinemas and their political contexts. Films will be drawn from both mainstream and independent cinema and will include the work of directors such as Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Danny and Oxide Pang, Nguyen Tan Hoang, Yau Ching, Thunska Pansittivorakul, Garin Nugroho, and Jean-Jacques Annaud.

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Questions of the body and sexuality, and their intersections in the African context carry a long history of contested significations in a process of apparently ceaseless revision. In this course, we will examine how contemporary postcolonial African works engage and revise controversial issues such as the conception in nineteenth-century racist writings of the colonized as embodiment rather than subject, or as pathological and hypersexed bodies. Additionally, we will take on contemporary othering discourses around HIV/AIDS and Female Genital Cutting, the criminalization of non-conventional sexualities, and women’s uses of their bodies as modes of contestation in the postcolonial nation-state. By investigating these questions, we enter debates around human rights, storytelling, neo-colonialism, sexuality, power and resistance. As we focus on how African fiction writers have taken up questions of the body and resistance, we will also engage theorists, including but not certainly limited to Agamben, Butler, Hoad, Mbembe, Mubimbe, and Spillers, detecting the ways in which practices and discourses around bodies in the African context shape contemporary theories and vice versa.
In what mood do we encounter “nature”? This seminar inflects this question in two ways, asking both how “we” feel in relation to non-human environments, and whether, and how, the non-human can be said to feel. We will consider the productive points of intersection between theories of affect, emotion, and sexuality, especially as they have been taken up in recent queer and feminist thought, and the diffuse wave of critical and cultural developments that has come to be called the “nonhuman turn.” We will examine the divergent threads contributing to the contemporary critical focus on the nonhuman, exploring their attention to the agential, sensory and cognitive capacities of the non-human, their reconfiguration of the relations between human and nonhuman worlds, and the more flexible and nuanced accounts of “nature” and “environments” that they make possible. We will critically examine the relationship between this body of thought and the emphasis on embodiment, feeling, and sensation in recent feminist and queer thought. At the same time, we will examine how the radically expanded ethos of being-in-common proposed by the non-human turn operates alongside the structures and histories of dehumanization to which and feminist, queer and critical race theory have drawn our attention. Readings will include work by Jane Bennett, Mel Y. Chen, Rob Nixon, Eduardo Kohn, Jasbir K. Puar. Timothy Morton, Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Heather Love; Sianne Ngai, and others.

This course will approach the theme of “sensation” through questions of method, focusing in particular on the interdisciplinary challenges of documenting and archiving sensation. Foundational for this inquiry will be theories of the archive from both queer studies and postcolonial studies, including critiques of the archive as impossible or politically suspect, as well as efforts to transform archival and documentary practice in order to represent feeling and sensation. We will explore the challenges presented by “extreme” states, such as trauma, and ordinary or everyday experience, both of which inspire critiques of affective modes such as sentimentality and melodrama as well as traditional modes of realism.