

Queer Film Theory (ENGD93HF)
Summer 2023

Course Description: This course examines relationships between queer looking and theorizations of cinema, focusing in particular on how an attentiveness to queer intimacies potentially transforms canonical portraits of cinematic identification, realism, and desiring circuits. In doing so, it not only addresses recent interventions into the field of queer film theory, but it also invites reflection on queer potentials latent in foundational arguments surrounding psychoanalytic subject formation, the cinematic apparatus, medium specificity, and aesthetic reading. Although this course will provide an overview of key touchstones in queer film history, it is less an overview of contributions by gender and sexual minority artists to cinema, and more of an exploration of how queer frameworks may illuminate interpretations of central cinematic operations (related to form, temporality, and spectatorship). In doing so, it illustrates how queerness is not a supplement to film theory – relevant only in discussions of representation – *and* how cinema is not a supplement to queerness, merely being the form through which existing ideas of identity are executed. Instead, this class emphasizes how queerness is inseparable from the basic mechanisms of the cinematic medium as well as how films and film theory can present new views on queer eroticism, community, and relationality. Here, queerness is present in the solicitation to look at images through an outside purview, in the urge to complicate divisions between public and private, in the pull to re-envision artificiality, in the capacity to meld identification and desire, in the need to reject a binary of affection and critique. The ultimate goal of this class is to elaborate manifold ways in which queerness can be used to alter our understanding of cinema, but also how cinema can be used to alter our understanding of queerness.

Course Schedule

Unit I (Spectatorship)

1. May 9: The Pleasures of Reading

Screening: *The Matrix* (Lana and Lilly Wachowski, 1999, 136 min.)

Reading: Cael M. Keegan, “Mirror Scene: Transgender Aesthetics in *The Matrix* and *Boys Don’t Cry*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Queer Cinema*, eds. Ronald Gregg and Amy Villarejo (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 491-511.

LeiLani Nishime, “Queer Keanu: The Politics of Bad Acting in the Age of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” in *Undercover Asian: Multiracial Asian Americans in Visual Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 21-40.

2. May 11: The Camera as Queer Look

Screening: *Blow Job* (Andy Warhol, 1964, 35 min.)

Reading: Damon R. Young, “The Vicarious Look, or Andy Warhol’s Apparatus Theory,” *Film Criticism* 39, no. 2 (2014): 25-52.

3. May 16: Identification/Desire

Screening: *Looking for Langston* (Isaac Julien, 1989, 42 min.) and *Tongues Untied* (Marlon Riggs, 1989, 55 min.)

Reading: Rachel Jane Carroll, “Can You Feel It? Beauty and Queer of Color Politics in *Looking for Langston*,” *Criticism* 60, no. 4 (2018): 487-509.

José Esteban Muñoz, "Performing Disidentifications," in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 1-34.

4. May 18: Refuting The Gaze?

Screening: *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (Chantal Akerman, 1978, 129 min.)

Reading: Madeline Ullrich, "Anna, Where Are You? Queer Form in Chantal Akerman's *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*," *ASAP Journal* 5, no. 2 (2020): 401-22.

Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18.

Unit II (Cinema)

5. May 23: Loving and Hating Cinema

Screening: *The Watermelon Woman* (Cheryl Dunye, 1996, 90 min.), and *Meeting of Two Queens* (Cecilia Barriga, 1991, 14 min.).

Reading: Karin D. Wimbley, "Stereotypy, Mammy, and Recovery in Cheryl Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman*," in *Sisters in the Life: A History of Out African American Lesbian Media-Making*, eds. Yvonne Welbon and Alexandra Juhasz (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 143-59.

Patricia White, "Lesbian Cinephilia," in *Unimitted: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 29-60.

6. May 25: Cruising the Theatre

Screening: *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (Tsai Ming-liang, 2003, 81 min.)

Reading: Jean Ma, "The Haunted Movie Theater," in *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 96-126.

Roland Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater," trans. Richard Howard in *The Rustle of Language* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 345-9.

Unit III (Form)

7. June 6: Crisis and Abstraction

Screening: *Blue* (Derek Jarman, 1993, 79 min.)

Reading: Jacques Khalip, "The Archaeology of Sound: Derek Jarman's *Blue* and Queer Audiovisuality in the Time of AIDS," *differences* 21, no. 2 (2010): 73-108.

Roger Hallas, "Sound, Image, and the Corporeal Implication of Witnessing," in *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 217-40.

8. June 8: Plasmatic Bodies

Screening: *Ferdinand the Bull* (Dick Rickard, 1938, 7 min.), *Begone Dull Care* (Evelyn Lambart and Norman McLaren, 1949, 8 min.), *What's Opera, Doc?* (Chuck Jones, 1957, 7 min.), *No No Nooky TV* (Barbara Hammer, 1987, 12 min), car transformation from *Adolescence of Utena* (Ikuhara Kunihiko, Japan, 1999, 8 min.).

Reading: Sergei Eisenstein, excerpts from *On Disney*, in *The Eisenstein Collection*, ed. Richard Taylor (New York: Seagull Books, 2006), 84-9, 95-107.

Eliza Steinbock, "Disjunction and Conjunction: Thinking Trans through the Cinematic," in *Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 1-25.

9. June 13: Butch/Camp

Screening: *Scorpio Rising* (Kenneth Anger, 1963, 28 min.), *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (Anger, 1965, 3 min.), *Me and Rubyfruit* (Sadie Benning, 1989, 5 min.), and *It Wasn't Love* (Benning, 1992, 20 min.).

Reading: Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), 275-92.

Sarah M. Panuska, "But Was it Camp?" Sadie Benning's *It Wasn't Love*," *Discourse* 43, no. 1 (2021): 98-122.

10. June 15: Against Realism

Screening: *Hausu* (Obayashi Nobuhiko, 1977, 88 min.)

Reading: Evan Calder Williams, "Sunset with Chainsaw," *Film Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (2011): 28-33.

Rosalind Galt, "Pretty: Film Theory, Aesthetics, and the History of the Troublesome Image," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 2 (2009): 1-41.