

Transgender Performance and Politics

Tisch School of the Arts
New York University
H95.0404.001
Thursday, 3:30-6:15
Fall 2009

Instructor: Jeanne Vaccaro
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Office Hours:
Thursday, 1:30-3:30

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the emerging and interdisciplinary field of Transgender Studies, and maps its genealogical development and divergence from Women's and Gender Studies and LGBT Studies. Students will survey the foundational as well as new canon of Transgender Studies and explore the myriad and shifting definitions of sex and gender in legal, biomedical, historic, and performance discourses. Understanding that multiple modes of identity formation such as race, nation, class, and ability inform both the concept and lived experience of transgender, the readings reflect a range of intellectual perspectives and voices that demonstrate the heterogeneity of transgender subjectivities. Transgender authors take center state in this course, and students will examine the role of self-representation in academic and artistic production.

Course Objectives

- ◆ To connect everyday, personal experiences of gender to institutional forms of identity production
- ◆ To relate sex and gender to the study of race, ethnicity, class, and ability
- ◆ To understand gender as both a performance and performative

Course Readings

All assigned reading will be available on Blackboard and via library reserve.

Online Library / Online Course Support

A Blackboard site for this course will provide additional opportunities to ask questions, discuss assigned reading, and share information.

Grading

Full and active participation, including attendance – 15%

Weekly response papers posted on Blackboard (1-2 pages) – 35%

Final research paper exploring one of the course themes (10-15 pages) – 50%

September 10: INTRODUCTION

Readings

- ◆ Kate Bornstein, "The Gender Aptitude Test," *My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, Real Woman, Real You, or Something Else Entirely*, p1-24
- ◆ Jacob Hale, "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing About Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans-"

Film Screening

- ◆ Morty Diamond, "Tranny Triptych"

September 17: THEORIZING TRANS-

What does it mean to "do" transgender theory, politics, and culture?

Readings

- ◆ David Valentine, "Imagining Transgender," *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*, p29-67
- ◆ Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, p223-242

September 24: DISCIPLINING DIFFERENCE

Should there be a "T" in LGBT Studies? What conflicts arise and collaborations are possible in the formation of a discipline?

Readings

- ◆ Vivian Namaste, "Tragic Misreadings: Queer Theory's Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity," *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*, p9-23
- ◆ David Valentine, "The Making of a Field: Anthropology and Transgender Studies," *Imaging Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*, p143-172

October 1: QUEERING THE ARCHIVE: TRANSGENDER HISTORY

How have ideas about gender evolved historically? How do transgender people fit into the cultural and political archive of lesbian and gay life?

Readings

- ◆ Michel Foucault, "Introduction," *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a 19th Century French Hermaphrodite*, pvii-xvii
- ◆ Susan Stryker, "Militant Foreshadowings," *Smash the Church, Smash the State: The Early Years of Gay Liberation*, p3-10
- ◆ Susan Stryker, "Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity," *Radical History Review*, p145-159
- ◆ Leslie Feinberg, "The Journey Begins," *Transgender Warriors*, p2-9

Film Screening

- ◆ Susan Stryker, "Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria"

October 8: **DIAGNOSING DIFFERENCE**

How is difference identified, managed, and 'corrected?' Which disciplines claim authority over and speak on behalf of transgender people?

Readings

- ◆ Judith Butler, "Undiagnosing Gender," *Undiagnosing Gender*, p75-101
- ◆ Claudine Griggs, "Pain" and "Aftermath," *Journal of a Sex Change: Passage Through Trinidad*, p49-66 and p196-210
- ◆ Harry Benjamin Institute, "Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders," www.wpath.org

Guest Speaker

- ◆ Pauline Park, New York Association for Gender Rights Advocacy

October 15: **(WRONG?) EMBODIMENT**

Is "being trapped in the wrong body" an accurate representation of transgender embodiment? How do theories of embodiment expand our ability to perceive and know transgender subjectivities?

Readings

- ◆ Jay Prosser, "A Skin of One's Own: Toward a Theory of Transsexual Embodiment," *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, p61-98
- ◆ Lucas Cassidy Crawford, "Transgender Without Organs? Mobilizing a Geo-Affective Theory of Transgender Body Modification," *WSQ: Trans-*, p127-142
- ◆ Nikki Sullivan, "The Role of Medicine in the (Trans)Formation of Wrong Bodies," *Body & Society*, p105-116

Film Screening

- ◆ Annalise Ophelian, "Diagnosing Difference"

October 22: **GENDER QUEER ART & AESTHETICS**

How to artistic and creative forms of self-expression expand our understanding of transgender subjectivities? What are the politics of self-representation?

Readings

- ◆ Judith Halberstam, "Technotopias: Representing Transgender Bodies in Contemporary Art," *In A Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, p97-124
- ◆ Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry*, p773-797

Guest Speaker

- ◆ Amos Mac, Editor-in-Chief of *Original Plumbing Magazine*

October 29: **TRANS-FEMINISM**

How do transgender bodies and identities confront the “natural” or comfortable limits of feminist theory and politics?

Readings

- ◆ Janice Raymond, “Sappho by Surgery: The Transsexually Constructed Lesbian Feminist,” *The Transgender Studies Reader*, p131-143
- ◆ Sandy Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” *The Transgender Studies Reader*, p221-235
- ◆ Julia Serano, “Trans Woman Manifesto,” *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scrapegoating of Femininity*, p11-22
- ◆ C.T. Whitley, “Too Sensitive? Exploring Trans-Masculine Femininity,” *Visible: A Femmethology*, p106-108
- ◆ Cei Bell, “Radical Queens Manifesto, 1973,” *Smash the Church, Smash the State: The Early Years of Gay Liberation*,” p113-114

Film Screening

- ◆ Jules Roskam, “Against a Trans Narrative”

Guest Speaker

- ◆ Jules Roskam, filmmaker

November 5: **A SAFE SPACE FOR WHOM?**

What is safe space, and how it is used to police borders and regulate difference?

Readings

- ◆ Ann Cvetkovich & Selena Wahng, “Please Don’t Stop the Music: Roundtable Discussion with Workers from the Michigan Women’s Music Festival,” *GLQ*, p131-151
- ◆ Sassafras Lowery, “Searching for My History,” *Visible: A Femmethology*, p81-83
- ◆ Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, p210-218

Film Screening

Dylan Mira, “A Call and An Offering: Pilot TV”

November 12: **DISABILITY**

Is transgender identity a disability? Is disability a useful framework to expand political and legal rights for transgender people?

Readings

- ◆ Eli Clare, “Neither Wing Nor Stone,” *From the Inside Out: Radical Gender Transformation, FTM and Beyond*, p147-154
- ◆ Robert McRuer, “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer-Disabled Existence,” *The Disability Studies Reader*, p301-309
- ◆ Jennifer L. Levi and Bennet H. Klein, “Pursing Protections for Transgender People through Disability Laws,” *Transgender Rights*, p74-92

Film Screening

- ◆ Loree Erickson, "Want"

November 19: **TRANSGENDER LEGAL THEORY**

What are the legal definitions of sex and gender, and how to transgender people navigate the legal system and articulate rights?

Readings

- ◆ Paisley Currah, "Gender Pluralisms Under the Transgender Umbrella," *Transgender Rights*, p3-31
- ◆ NYC Guidelines Regarding Gender Identity Discrimination
- ◆ Case Law – Ulane V. Eastern Airlines, Littleton V. Prange, Smith V. City of Salem, Schwent V. Hartford, Schroer V. Billington

Film Screening

- ◆ Janet Baus, "Cruel and Unusual"

Guest Speaker

- ◆ Dru Levasseur, Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund

December 3: **INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES**

How is the formation of gender always also an expression of racial and ethnic identity, citizenship, and class? What are the politics of passing?

Readings

- ◆ Emi Koyama, "Whose Feminism Is It Anyway: The Unspoken Racism of the Trans Inclusion Debate," *The Transgender Studies Reader*, p698-705
- ◆ Max Wolf Valerio, "Now That You're A White Man..." *This Bridge We Call Home*, p239-245
- ◆ Bobby Noble, "Our Bodies Our Not Ourselves: Tranny Guys and the Racialized Class Politics of Embodiment," *Trans/Forming Feminisms*, p94-105

Film Screening

- ◆ Morty Diamond, "Trans Entities: The Nasty Love of Papi and Wil"

December 10: **QUEER GEOGRAPHIES, TRANSGENDER UTOPIAS**

Where and how can we locate radical gender? What literal and conceptual landscapes gesture toward gender liberation?

- ◆ José Muñoz, "Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Feeling: Approaching Kevin Aviance," *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, p133-152
- ◆ Eva Hayward, "More Lessons from a Starfish: Prefixal Flesh and Transspeciated Selves," p64-85

Film Screening

- ◆ Chris Vargas and Eric Stanly, "Homotopia"