

Winter 2017

## **WGS 365: Queer Theory**

Professor: Dr. Cael M. Keegan

Email: [keeganc@gvsu.edu](mailto:keeganc@gvsu.edu)

Website: [www.caelkeegan.com](http://www.caelkeegan.com)

Office: 211 Lake Ontario Hall

Office hours: W 1:30-4:30

1. **Course Meeting Time:** TR 2:30-3:45 pm  
Location: 214 The Connection
2. **Film Lab Time (optional):** Selected Wednesdays, 6:00-8:00 pm  
Location: Milton E. Ford LGBT Resource Center

“A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at.”  
-Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*

“We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces.”  
-Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life”

“Knowledge of freedom is (in) the invention of escape, stealing away in the confines, in the form, of a break. This is held close in the open song of the ones who are supposed to be silent.”  
-Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons*

### **Course Overview:**

#### **Course Description:**

This course engages in an interdisciplinary examination of theoretical approaches to sexuality and gender. It focuses on contemporary queer theory, including its historical development.

#### **Course Philosophy:**

What are “queer” and “trans\*\*,” how do we make sense of them, and what are the theoretical potentials for them as practices of freedom? We will delve into the variety of theories developed by queer and trans\* thinkers, activists, and cultural workers to theorize non- and anti-normative modes of discourse, sociality, sexuality, gender, politics, space, time, and aesthetics.

Rather than presenting a survey, the course offers a thematically clustered archive of major conversation points in queer and trans\* theory. It attempts to capture the gestural and genealogical methodologies of queer/trans\* theoretical argumentation, which resist linear and logical structures. Through the intensive reading and focused class discussion, you will improve your ability to read, write,

and ask questions about the theoretical and political potentials of “queer” and “trans\*” as both concepts and lived realities.

As an **interdisciplinary course**, this class combines techniques and materials from **gender studies, feminist studies, literary studies, and media studies**. Recognizing the fundamental relationship that queer theory shares with the practice of textual analysis, we will examine a wide range of cultural objects/practices to help us learn to apply theory: We will employ a graphic novel as an overarching “spine” throughout the course, pairing this with primary theoretical texts as well as films that have important historical relationships with queer/trans\* theories and that illustrate the course’s main concepts. Then, we will use the theories we have mastered to identify problems in our current reality and design utopian activist or research projects in response.

This course is the intermediate core course for the LGBTQ Minor. It also prepares students to develop research and/or activist projects for the LGBTQ Minor capstone course, WGS 491. This syllabus is subject to change as determined by the professor.

### **Objectives:**

As a result of taking this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a fundamental understanding of contemporary queer theories, research, concepts, and their major concerns/debates.
2. Explain the interdisciplinary roots of queer theory and how queer theory continues to inform and be inflected by other disciplines.
3. Productively use concepts in queer theory to assess social and political movements.
4. Employ course concepts to design an advanced research program and/or an activist project.

### **Required Texts:**

Required texts are available at the GVSU bookstore. There is also a hard copy of of each text on course reserve at the Mary Idema Pew Library. There are additional readings assigned via electronic reserve on Blackboard, indicated as **BB**.

1. Meg-John Barker and Julia Scheele, *Queer: A Graphic History*.
2. Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*.

### **Required Films:**

Unless otherwise noted, all films are on course reserve for viewing at the Mary Idema Pew Library. Films will be screened for the class as a group during Film Lab. These lab sessions will include a short discussion of the film by the professor, which will also be posted on Blackboard as the **Film Lab podcast series**. If you cannot attend the lab, films and podcasts may also be reviewed on

your own schedule using the reserve copies and BB. You may also purchase/rent these films on your own.

1. *Paris is Burning*
2. *The Watermelon Woman*
3. *The Living End*
4. *Born in Flames*
5. *Finding Nemo*
6. *Bound*
7. *The Matrix*
8. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*
9. *The Wizard of Oz*

**Other Required Materials:**

Paper and pen/pencil for in-class writing

Printed copies of your work when required

Printed, marked-up copies of the readings posted on Blackboard

Access to your GVSU email (you are required to check this daily)

**Notes on Course Materials:**

1. As participants in the course, we come from a wide spectrum of sexual and gender identities. Some of us might identify as queer or trans others might not: Who you are does not make you a more or less important contributor to this course, nor does it indicate a greater or lesser degree of familiarity with course materials.

2. Some materials in this course are sexually explicit; other materials represent violence and may be disturbing. If you are concerned about engaging intellectually with such materials, please familiarize yourself with the course content and let me know in advance via email or by discussing your concerns with me during my office hours. Please also seek support by accessing available resources on campus:

Counseling Center: <https://www.gvsu.edu/counsel/>

LGBT Resource Center: <http://www.gvsu.edu/lgbtrc/>

Office of Inclusion and Equity: <http://www.gvsu.edu/inclusion/>

Women's Center: [http://gvsu.edu/women\\_cen/](http://gvsu.edu/women_cen/)

Multicultural Affairs: <http://gvsu.edu/oma/>

Report a Bias Incident: [http://www.gvsu.edu/inclusion/bias\\_incidents.htm](http://www.gvsu.edu/inclusion/bias_incidents.htm)

Veterans Network: <http://www.gvsu.edu/veterans/>

3. Theoretical materials are often “difficult” in that they are written in a specific academic style and use uncommon philosophical and political vocabularies. There will be times in this course when you struggle to understand the materials. That’s okay! Few, if any of us, will understand the course materials perfectly. **Perfection is not expected.** Instead, I expect you to do your best and to pursue WHY you are not understanding something by asking effective questions and working toward a better grasp. Don’t get discouraged if you don’t “get it” right away!

4. This course is an attempt to represent some of the most important ideas structuring queer and trans\* theories as fields. It is not intended to be comprehensive, and does not promise to cover the entirety of either field.

**This is a discussion-based seminar-style course:** participation is highly valued and students are expected to:

1. Contribute significantly to discussion each week by reading/viewing the assigned texts before class and speaking during class in ways that demonstrate your comprehension of the texts. All students are expected to be active members of a community of learners in this course. You are responsible for material covered in all class days, whether you are present or absent.
2. Be on time and engaged. Lateness will affect your grade. If you expect to have trouble getting to class on time or attending regularly, please see me right away.

## Course Policies:

**Classroom Conduct:** Any speech or behavior that shows disrespect or intolerance toward other students in class or toward the professor is unacceptable. As college students, you will be expected to participate in class discussions in ways that demonstrate maturity and open-mindedness with respect to our diversity (including but not limited to differences in educational and economic background, age, race, nationality, gender, sexuality, ability, politics, religion, etc.). This does not mean that you cannot disagree with me or your classmates—respectful and fair debate is actually the basis for a successful class. However, all debate/disagreement must be conducted within the spirit of mutual respect that a college classroom requires.

You are expected to respect others' identities and to use others' names-in-use and gender pronouns. Rigorous and respectful intellectual discussion and debate is required. Personal attacks, disruptive behavior, hate speech, slurs, stereotyping, distractions/interruptions, and aggressive domination of the classroom discussion are expressions of disrespect. Students who engage in disrespectful behaviors will be warned and may be asked to leave the classroom or to drop the course.

Cell phones and other electronic devices may not be used in class unless I direct you to use them for an assignment (exception: note-taking equipment for students who require it – please let me know). Please plan on staying in class for the whole class period unless it is urgent for you to leave or you have made arrangements with me ahead of time.

**Academic Honesty:**

Academic honesty is required of all students. Plagiarism occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as their own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgement, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as their own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. All instances of plagiarism will be reported, and may result in course failure or even dismissal from GVSU. To see GVSU's official policy on plagiarism, please see the Student Code, section 223.00 (<https://www.gvsu.edu/studentcode/>). If you are unsure of how to properly cite material and fear that you might unintentionally plagiarize sources, please see me or contact the Writing Center (<http://www.gvsu.edu/wc/>) for help.

**Diversity Statement:**

GVSU is committed to an inclusive environment free from discrimination and conducive of open inquiry, a multiplicity of ideas, a liberal education, and a healthy community. Diversity is not only respected in our classrooms: It is supported.

**GVSU's Non-Discrimination Statement:**

Every aspect of University life should be free from discrimination because of age, color, disability, familial status, height, marital status, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sex/gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, veteran status, or weight. Student housing, organizations, athletics, classes and University community facilities should be open to all who desire to participate.

**Gender Expression and Identity:**

If your legal name does not match your name in use, it can be updated. Please refer to GVSU MyName here: <https://bit.ly/2PBt9R2>.

**Disability Accommodations:**

If you are a student with a disability for which you may need accommodations, you should contact Disability Support Services (616-331-2490) and then have a private discussion with me. Please also see me if you have concerns about evacuating the building during an emergency so we can develop a plan to assist you.

**Student Basic Needs:**

Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in this course is urged to contact the Dean of Students Office at (616) 331-3585 or [dso@gvsu.edu](mailto:dso@gvsu.edu) for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable doing so. This will enable me to connect you with any resources of which I am aware.

**Attendance Policy:**

Attending class is required. At the same time, I realize that that there will be instances when you will not be able to make it to class. You are permitted **2 free absences** from this course (a full week). **Additional absences will lower your grade in this class.** It is the student's responsibility to make up all assignments on their own if absences become necessary. Lateness also disrupts the class community and may be treated as an absence. If you know now that you are going to be routinely late to class or will need to miss a class meeting, please notify me right away.

**Course Assignments and Requirements:**

Showing Up (see below)	15% (150 points)
In-Class Journaling	27% (10 points per class, total of 270 points)
Prompted Critical Essays (2)	20% (100 points each)
Reading and Mapping Project	10% (50 points for write-up, 50 points for presentation)
Queer/Trans* Object Reading	8% (80 points)
Utopian Activist/Research Project	20% (200 points)

**Requirements for Assignments:**

In-class and out-of-class work will be assigned throughout the course. All assignments are due by class time on the day indicated. No late work without an official excuse is accepted. No emailed assignments will be accepted without prior authorization. Extensions for major assignments may be granted by the professor on a case-by-case basis, as per documented need. You must ask for an extension well before (1 week) the assignment due date.

Assignments that are turned in under length will be returned to the student and considered incomplete until they are rewritten to meet requirements.

If you know you are going to miss a class, you may turn work in early with the professor's permission. Printing difficulties are not acceptable excuses for late work: plan ahead! It is not okay to submit work for this class that has been submitted to another class for academic credit.

**Grading Scale:**

Percent	Grade
94-100	A
90-93	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C

70-72	C-
67-69	D+
60-66	D
< 60	F

### **Grade Explanations:**

A: Represents work of exceptional skill and quality. Indicates evidence of engagement with important information and ideas in course materials, podcasts, and other sources, thoroughness, careful thinking, integration of materials across topics, sound logical reasoning, and precise and artful writing/speaking.

B: Signifies levels of solid accomplishment and above-average work in comparison to peers and in relation to assignment expectations.

C: Denotes works that fulfill the assignment requirements, but only adequately.

D: Represents work that does not fulfill assignment requirements, but that is deserving of partial credit due to effort.

F: Indicates work that does not deserve credit.

### **My Grading Practice:**

This is a course that develops your reading, analysis, theorization, and research skills. Active reading and viewing of/listening to the materials, “showing up” (see below), and a spirit of self-directed inquiry and reflection are baseline expectations for success in the course. Beyond your demonstration of these basic expectations, my grading practice will be focused on your ability to successfully apply key concepts and theories we are learning, to reason clearly about the cultural and political constructs we are examining, to anticipate and ethically weigh counterarguments or competing perspectives, and to develop insights about your own identity position relative to the material. It is crucial to understand that **analysis and theorization** are fundamentally different from the stating of “what is”: They are the ability to grasp how all truth claims are situated within specific multidimensional historical, cultural, and ethical contexts, and the capability to speculate beyond those conditions toward new perspectives. It is my goal to have you come out of this class conducting less passive observation and engaging in more analysis and theorization (you may feel like you know less “for sure” after taking this class), and my grading practice will reflect that aim.

### **Requirements for Assignments:**

In-class and out-of-class work will be assigned throughout the course.

Assignments are due by class time on the day listed unless otherwise indicated.

Short extensions on major assignments may be granted if a student asks well in advance (a week) and has a demonstrated conflict or need. There is no makeup opportunity if you miss an assignment without asking for an extension.

Assignments that are turned in under length will be returned to the student and considered incomplete until they are rewritten to meet requirements. If you know you are going to miss a class, you may turn work in early with the professor’s permission.

Printing difficulties are not acceptable excuses for late work: Plan ahead! It is not okay to submit work for this class that has been submitted to another class for academic credit.

### **Assignments:**

#### **Showing Up (participation in class and online): 150 points**

Here are five basic qualities I look for from students in my courses: Together, they constitute *showing up*:

1. Investment—Demonstrating that you value the course, your classmates, and me.
2. Preparation—Being ready to talk, think, and be in community with people different from you.
3. Openness—Showing us who you are and what you care about.
4. Risk-taking—Willingness to be vulnerable/try and fail in order to expand your skills and thinking.
5. Integrity—Honesty in your behavior and in your work.

***Showing up for this class is more than just physically attending.*** It is being present, being real, and contributing sincerely to the class community. It is demonstrating that you have come to class not just prepared, but invested in some way that you have figured out for yourself. It is showing that you value other students by offering your thoughts/feelings and responding respectfully to theirs. It is being able to risk disclosure or disagreement while still practicing empathy toward others. I expect you to be in class, on time, and focused, yes—but you can do all that and still not be fully *showing up*. Showing up means recognizing that you are a resource to everyone else in the room and attending class with that presence. If you expect to have trouble getting to class on time or attending regularly, please see me right away.

#### **Journal (in class): 270 points**

At the beginning of each class, I will give you some time to write informally about the day's material. You should spend this time reflecting on what you think the most valuable concepts/ideas in the material were, and then asking related questions. What would you like to talk about in class, and how did the material bring up these questions for you? This should take under 10 minutes, so come to class with some ideas about what you will write. You will be evaluated on your accuracy and your critical thinking.

#### **Critical Essays (online): 200 points**

Each of these 2 (double spaced, 7 page minimum) essays will ask you to reflect on your thinking in relation to the material covered in class and show how you are moving toward mastery and synthesis of the course concepts. They will also



ask you to show facility for applying theory to your lived experience and the larger world. These are prompted essays. I will share all prompts with you well in advance of the essay due dates.

These essays should:

1. Demonstrate a fundamental understanding of the course theories, research, concepts, and their major concerns/debates.
2. Show that you understand interdisciplinary nature of queer theory and how queer theory continues to inform and be inflected by other disciplines (e.g intersections of feminism, queer theory, trans\* theory, critical race theory, literary theory, film theory, sociology, anthropology, etc.).
3. Productively use concepts in queer theory to assess social and political movements.
4. Be written using clear, correct, and appropriate grammar, in-text citations, and a bibliography.
5. You must quote and cite materials (at least 4) from the syllabus in your essays. **You must also locate and use 1 additional scholarly article from a major journal in the field** (e.g. *GLQ*, *TSQ*, *QED*, *Journal of Homosexuality*, *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, *Sexualities*, *Queer Studies in Media and Popular Culture*).

#### **Reading and Mapping Project (online and in class): 100 points**

This project measures your ability to collaboratively engage the material and to demonstrate a deep understanding of the research, concepts, and major concerns/debates in a single course text. In a team, you will be assigned one a text to investigate using steps 1-6 in “Reading and Viewing: A Student Worksheet on Critique” (on BB). Your team will read the piece closely, taking notes for each step. For step 5, you will need to do some team research: Look up the other texts that your text cites and investigate who/what/why your assigned piece is referencing them. Who wrote those pieces, and where/when were they published? Why might your author have selected them as evidence? Collaborate to write a short paragraph for each step, and be prepared to walk the class through your findings. For full credit, upload your shared writing about each step to Blackboard.

#### **Queer/Trans\* Object Reading (online and in class): 80 points**

In this short paper/presentation, you will select a text or object and apply the theories from our course to show how theory can produce new interpretations of/ knowledges about society and politics. How does the text or object you selected reflect the ideas we’ve been discussing in class? How might the text be theorized as containing or illuminating queer/trans\* social or political possibilities? For examples of how to do this, pay close attention to the theorists we’ll be reading and the short podcasts given by the professor at Film Lab. See also the included appendix “**Getting a Read: A Student Worksheet on Critique.**” You may either:

1. Write up your reading as a short paper (2 pages minimum) and upload it to BB.
2. Make a 5 minute video/audio version of your reading and upload it to BB.

Your reading must make direct reference to course materials, and must be uploaded to BB in file form. Make sure to include a representation of the primary object or text you are reading. You will be assigned a week during which your reading will be due, and you will have a chance to share a short demonstration of your reading with the class.

### **Utopian Activist/Research Project (online and at final session): 200 points**

This project measures your ability to apply an integrated understanding of queer theory's major concepts to a social or political problem. Theory is not just critiquing "what is": it is also attempting to define what should be. Using concepts and world-making tools gleaned from our course materials, you will identify a problem in the known world and then construct your own theory-based utopian response for "what should be" using course concepts and the model outlined in Charlotte Bunch's "**Not By Degrees**" (posted on BB). This project can be written, recorded, or artistically represented (must include an artist's statement). You may work alone or with others. This is also an opportunity to build a theoretical or research framework for your WGS 491 project. Our final meeting will be a showcase in which the whole class will share their work.

## **Course Schedule:**

\*You only need to listen to the Film Lab podcast if you are unable to come to a specific Film Lab.

### **Week 1**

#### **Why Queer Theory?**

- T Introduction to course and learning community  
Read: Heather Love, "Queer." **BB**.
- R Read: Michael Warner, "What Do Queers Want? **BB**.  
Read: "What We Want, What We Believe." **BB**.

### **Week 2**

#### **What is Queer? What is Trans\*? What is Theory?**

- T Read: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, "Who Are You?" through "Queer and Trans: The Terf Wars."
- R Read: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, "Butler on Trans" through "Thinking Completely Queerly."

**Week 3****Theory and Praxis**

- T Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Foucault and Butler” and “Michel Foucault.”  
 Read: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1.* (31-49) **BB**.  
 Read: Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life.” **BB**.
- R Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Back Feminists” and “Crenshaw’s Intersectionality.”  
 Read: Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power.” **BB**.  
 Read: “The Combahee River Collective Statement.” **BB**.

**Queer Politics**

- T Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Rubin’s Thinking Sex,” “The Sex Hierarchy” and “Queer Agendas.”  
 Read: Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of Sexuality.” **BB**.
- R Revisit: Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “The Assumptions of Identity Politics” and “Heteronormativity.”  
 Read: Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics.” **BB**.

**Week 5****Gender/Sex/Race Trouble**

- T Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Judith Butler,” “What Butler Saw” and “The Assumptions of Identity Politics.”  
 Read: Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination.” **BB**.
- W Film Lab: *Paris is Burning*
- R Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Gender Performativity,” “Doing Gender” and “Gender Trouble.”  
 Watch and Listen: *Paris is Burning* and Film Lab podcast (**BB**).

**Week 6**

- T Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Butler on Trans,” and “Co-opting Trans Experience?”  
 Read: Viviane Namaste, “Tragic Misreadings: Queer Theory’s Erasure of Trans\*gender Subjectivity.” **BB**.
- R Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Why Should Race be Central to Queer Theory?,” “Responses to the Marginalization of Race,” and “Southern Theory.”  
 Read: E. Patrick Johnson, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother.” **BB**.

**Week 7****Queer of Color Critique—Disidentification**

- T Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Multiple Identities and Marginalization,” “Queer Engagements” and “Focus on Texts.”  
Jose Esteban Muñoz, “Introduction,” *Disidentifications*. **BB**.
- W Film Lab, *The Watermelon Woman*
- R Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Interrogating Race” and “Queer Ways Through the Double-Binds?”  
Watch and Listen: *The Watermelon Woman* and Film Lab podcast. **BB**.

**Week 8****The Antisocial Thesis**

- T Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Another Funny Turn” and “No Future.”  
Read: Heather Love, “The Politics of Refusal.” **BB**.
- W Film Lab: *The Living End*
- R Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “HIV/AIDS and Activism.”  
Read: Anonymous Queers, “Queers Read This.” **BB**.  
Watch and Listen: *The Living End* and Film Lab podcast. **BB**.

**Week 9**

- T Read: Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*. **BB**.
- W Film Lab: *Born in Flames*
- R Read: Chu, “On Liking Women.” **BB**.  
Watch and Listen: *Born in Flames* and Film Lab podcast. **BB**.  
**First half Queer/Trans\* Object Readings due (BB) and showcase**

**Week 10**

- T No class—Spring Break
- R No class—Spring Break

**Week 11**

- T Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Halberstam and Low Theory,” and “Dude, Where’s my Gender?”  
Read: Jack Halberstam, “The Queer Art of Failure.” **BB**.
- W Film Lab: *Finding Nemo*
- R Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Collectivism in Finding Nemo.”  
Watch and Listen: *Finding Nemo* and Film Lab podcast. **BB**.  
**Critical Essay 1 due (BB)**

**Week 12****Queer and Trans\* Affects and Phenomenologies**

- T** Revisit: Barker and Scheele *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Queer Feelings.”  
Read: Sarah Ahmed, “Orientations: Towards a Queer Phenomenology.” **BB.**
- W** Film Lab: *Bound*
- R** Revisit: Barker and Scheele *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Affective and Temporality Turns.”  
Watch and Listen: *Bound* and Film Lab podcast. **BB.**

**Week 13**

- T** Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Delusions of Gender.”  
Read: Jack Halberstam, “Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies.” **BB.**
- W** Film Lab: *The Matrix*
- R** Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “The Heterosexual Matrix” and “Challenging the Heterosexual Matrix”  
Watch and Listen: *The Matrix* and Film Lab podcast. **BB.**

**Week 14****Reverse Discourse**

- T** Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Becoming,” “Power Relations,” “Trans Studies,” and “Materiality Matters.”  
Read: Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix.” **BB.**
- W** Film Lab: *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*
- R** Watch and Listen: *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and Film Lab podcast. **BB.**
- Utopian Project proposals due to professor**  
**Second half Queer/Trans\* Object Analyses due (BB) and showcase**

**Week 15****Queer Utopias**

- T** Class meets in the Seidman House for a viewing of the *Oz* rare books archive.  
Revisit: Barker and Scheele, *Queer, A Graphic History*, “Thinking Queerly,” and “Thinking (Completely) Queerly.”  
Read: Jose Esteban Muñoz, “Feeling Utopia.” **BB.**
- W** Film Lab: *The Wizard of Oz*
- R** Watch and Listen: *The Wizard of Oz* and Film Lab podcast. **BB.**

<b>Reflection Essay 2 due (BB)</b>
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**Week 16**

<b>Final exam session</b>
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TBA	Queer Utopian Projects due <b>(BB)</b> by exam time Performance/reading showcase of class projects
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**Appendix****Getting a Read: A Student Worksheet on Critique\***

This worksheet will instruct you in how to be prepared to have a substantive discussion in class.

Applied theoretical analysis of a cultural text requires two initial levels of study:

1. **Close reading-** Detailed, close observation of the “what” we are considering or looking at (i.e. “the text”). What am I seeing/hearing? What is happening in and around the text? What is its form? What is the context for our encounter with the text?
2. **Critical thinking-** Thorough consideration of the “hows” and “whys” that arise from close observation. Why is the text designed this way? How is it communicating ideas to me? Why does this text exist in this form, and not some other? How is this text affecting me?

Observing closely and thinking critically about what we encounter helps us to make more informed claims about the function, purpose, and effects of texts. In other words, it helps us **to theorize in an informed manner** about how/why a certain text might be important, and to explain and defend that theory. Close reading and critical thinking help us to explain why things have meaning, rather than simply being. Basic interpretation of a text is called “reading.” Considering the utility or effects of that reading is then called **critique**. A “reading” of a text is simply an argument that uses close observation of a text’s form and content to claim how that text should be interpreted. Critique is the discussion of what that reading might offer us, vs. other readings. Critiquing means analyzing to understand how there might be competing readings of a text, considering the effects of those readings, what they might do, why they might be useful, and ultimately determining which reading is the most theoretically defensible and valuable to the context in which you are theorizing.

All objects we engage with in class will be referred to as “texts” precisely because all these materials can be “read” through analysis in a manner similar to how we might read a written text. Films, television shows, pieces of music—all of these are the result of huge undertakings involving many people and large amounts of resources. They are constructed in a particular manner for specific reasons. They do not merely exist as unified and simple products, but are designed from pieces with certain effects in mind. By looking at them closely, we can better understand both their overt and covert

messages, and analyze their impacts on both us and the larger culture. In other words, **things mean other things, and those meanings matter.**

### **Why does reading matter to queer and trans\* studies?**

Queer and transgender people, who are often very different from our families of origin, encounter a world that is not designed for us, and that generally pretends that we do not exist. We therefore have to perform the work of “seeing through” or “looking beyond” our cultures’ ideological messages that we are not real, and that what we experience does not matter. We have had to labor to develop new languages and theories to name what we feel. Some of the earliest work queer theorists did was reading to show how Western culture has systematically denied the existence of queer and trans people, while simultaneously relying on our stigmatized existence to make the categories of “man,” “woman,” and “heterosexual” intelligible. By reading with a queer or trans\* lens, we can see how rich stores of queer/trans meaning-making are actually all around us, despite being taught that our culture is “not about” queer or trans experiences.

### **So, How Should I Read?**

#### **Step 1: Identify the text’s form and context**

What is it you are attempting to read? What is its medium? Its genre? Who created it, and when? What is its main audience? Its point of origin? Is it a primary or secondary source? Specificity is important, here: not all texts are the same, and formal qualities are crucial to understanding a text’s organization and function.

#### **Step 2: Identify the argument**

What is the text’s reason for existing? What is its “big idea?” Why did its maker create it? This may be obvious, or you may need to engage in some thinking/questioning to uncover the argument. Nonfiction written texts often explain their arguments quite clearly. However, in the case of an artistic work like fiction or a film, you may need to think about what cultural values or audience perspectives the text is most upholding and/or challenging.

#### **Step 3: How is the text organized?**

How does the text lead you to its big idea? How does it arrive at its reason for existing? What is its rhetorical “shape?” Identify how the text uses logic to advance its major claim. In the case of a creative work, identify how the text uses formal structures like plot or character development to advance its big idea.

#### **Step 4: How does the text use evidence?**

What evidence does the text you are reading draw upon to advance its ideas? Texts will use a wide range of evidence to support their claims, from statistics to history to logical principles. Which evidence does the text you are reading marshal, and which of these uses of evidence do you find most convincing? In a creative work, how does the text reference points in history, science, religion, or cultural beliefs to support its argument?

#### **Step 5: Who is the author in conversation with?**

What kind of audience does the author imagine as ideal for this text? What is the larger conversation between this audience and similar texts “about?” What other scholars or

experts does the text call upon, respond to, or use to defend itself? What are those scholars' main ideas and why are they important? In a creative work, you will often see other canonical creative works referenced as the text seeks to position itself in conversation with prior important works. In formal academic writing, this is called **citation**, while in cultural texts it is called **intertextuality or referentiality**.

**Step 6: What is at stake?**

A good way to investigate this is to ask yourself, "Who cares" or, "So what?" Does what the text is saying, ultimately, matter? You will need to use all your observations from each of these steps to determine whether the text is valuable in the context under which you are considering it. You will also have to be able to say WHY/WHY NOT a text matters and what you think its specific contribution is, in light of your collected observations.

**Techniques for reading written texts:**

- Identify and define the text's keywords
- Bullet point the text's major arguments and its secondary supporting arguments
- Map the text's organization of ideas by drawing a concept map or annotating the margins of each paragraph. Underline/circle major ideas and make note of points that stand out to you or require more analysis.
- Write out the text's main argument in one sentence, in your own words. Jot down questions you need to return to or want to raise in class.

**Techniques for reading films:**

- Take note of the film's content: characters, plot, setting, dialogue, sound, and mis-en-scene (arrangement of frames within shots)
- Take note of the film's form: editing (construction of scenes through cuts), montage (sequence and compression of shots), camera angles, picture quality, and image format
- Consider the film's implied audience, as well as its genre and the history of that genre's conventions
- Consider the film's message (its reason for existing) and its politics (what worldview does it uphold in delivering its message?)

\*This sheet was developed by permission from "How to Read and Watch," by Ramzi Fawaz