Laura Aguilar “Grounded #114”

ANTH/WGS 166A Queer/Trans Theories From Elsewhere (Fall 2020)
Tue/Thur 3:30 – 4:50

Instructors
V Varun Chaudhry (WGS) | Rabb Graduate Center 109 | Office Hours TBD
Brian A. Horton (Anthropology) | Brown Social Science Center 205 | Office Hours Tue 12:00 — 2:00 PM

Course Description
How do we know what it means to study gender and sexuality? Are gender and sexuality Western constructs? Can we apply gender and sexuality outside of the United States, outside of Eurocentric concepts, and outside of comparisons to white, cisgender, heterosexual, male bodies? Can these questions only be asked from the ivory tower? How, or perhaps more accurately, where, can we ask these questions? This course centers the notion of “elsewhere” in relationship to studies of gender, sexuality, power, and desire. “Elsewhere” refers not only to place, but also to body and method. While terms like “queer” and “transgender” have become useful analytics for exploring gender, sexuality, feeling, space, place, relationality, and time, the academic theories that focus on these categories have remained mostly within white, US- and European academic spaces. These contributions, though crucial to our understanding of queerness and transness as analytics, themes, methods and theories, also need to be troubled. We also invite students to trouble these analytics - that is, the categories themselves, the bodies that these analytics center, and the methods deployed in relation to these analytics - by reading diverse approaches to gender and sexuality. The semester’s engagement with “elsewhere” is divided into three units: body, place, and method. The first queries whose bodies have been centered as well as marginalized and excluded from theories of gender and sexuality, drawing on queer and trans of color critique, autoethnographies, black feminist theory, and class conversations with sexual and gender diverse peoples from across the globe. The second focuses on place by turning outside of the United States to help students develop decolonial theories of gender and sexuality. The third, method, looks beyond academic scholarship toward memoirs, documentary film, popular culture, poetry, and activism, to ask how to study gender and sexuality in ways that are critical of racialized, colonial, and patriarchal forms of power. At the heart of our discussions is a troubling of the word “theory.” If we take theory as a bird’s eye view of the world, then our objective is to teach students to cultivate new ways of seeing and ultimately new theories of gender and sexuality through engaging with non-canonical perspectives. During the semester, we will assess students through a combination of presentations, weekly class discussions, and brief writing assignments. The course will conclude with students developing an original presentation and project wherein they develop and theorize an original gender and sexuality concept that they pull from their experiences, popular culture, or other sources beyond class texts. For upper level and graduate students, this final project might instead be a research proposal or part of thesis/doctoral work. This will culminate in a public presentation of their work for the Brandeis community.
Course Objectives:
1. Develop and apply skills in cultural analysis, relying on queer and transgender studies as lenses for thinking about social, political, religious, economic, and cultural phenomena.
2. Become familiar with the essential concepts, paradigms, and debates that have shaped scholarly understandings of sexuality and gender, race, class, caste and various social positionalities within anthropology, social theory, and social scientific research more broadly.
3. Develop strong oral presentation skills through weekly class participation and engaged seminar discussions.
4. Be able to write cogent and succinct critical reflections and responses to course readings and material and succinctly describe the main points of complex/dense theoretical texts and concepts through infographics or short word limits.

Course Structure and Requirements:
Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of nine hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.
This course is in no way comprehensive, but rather attempts to cover some interesting and important concepts, themes, and events related to queer and transgender studies. The course is divided into approximately 14 weeks.
We will meet twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:30 to 4:50PM. Our course will be a combination of teaching, seminar discussion, presentations, film/media, and activities. The course is reading intensive, but is designed to offer a survey of major questions, sub-fields, and possible new directions in queer anthropology. Each week students will come to class having read the readings assigned. As you read you should annotate, make notes, and read closely. In class we will also go over the texts slowly and methodically together, so please come with questions and highlighted passages that were not clear or you feel are worthy of further discussion.

COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Classroom Culture: This is an anthropology/WGS course on topics related to gender, sex, sexuality, race, class, nationality, identity, power and a range of topics and themes that are both timely and sensitive. As your instructors, it is our promise to you that we will do our best to make our classroom space inclusive of all regardless of background, ability, or perspective. As a budding scholar, it is important to remember that our work is dialogic—conversational—and collaborative. We will be each other's interlocutors, discussion partners, and teachers. To this end we must create an intellectual space that is predicated on listening, rather than just hearing. To listen is not just to hear other people's voices, but to internalize, to reflect, to witness, and to acknowledge what your peers have said. Some of the readings, ideas, comments, and discussions may make you uncomfortable or upset. However, this should not make you reluctant to respond or engage in class participation or discussion. Rather, consider how to formulate your ideas and responses in ways that demonstrate solid listening skills and an engagement with the texts and course materials. Help create a respectful listening and speaking space by waiting for others to finish speaking, acknowledging what others have said, and giving all students access to the discussion space. And always, use “I” statements when speaking.

While academic freedom is a cornerstone of a liberal arts education, that freedom is not synonymous with discriminatory remarks or hateful speech. In this course, we will not use language that discriminates on the basis or race, sex, gender identity/expression, religion, nationality, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, caste, ability, medical status, or age. That being said, while we may not intend to injure, things happen. As the instructors, we will consider these moments as teachable and commit to work to unpack them as well as offer students ample opportunities to raise concerns in class or privately.

Academic Integrity: You and you alone are responsible for your work in this course. Cheating, lying, stealing, and sabotaging the learning of others are unacceptable behaviors. Facilitating the abilities of others to engage in this behavior is also equally unacceptable. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this (or any other) course. In the instance of any violations, the University’s Codes of Student and Academic Conduct will be followed. For more
information please consult Brandeis University’s Rights and Responsibilities (Section 4 on Maintenance of Academic Integrity).

**Attendance and Preparation:** Attendance is mandatory at all classes; unexcused absences will count against your final grade as will unexcused and persistent lateness. We understand that extenuating circumstances may and often do arise. In the event that you are going to miss a class please email us at least 24 hours prior to class detailing the reason for your absence.

**Accommodations:** Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with us and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. We want to support you. In order to provide test accommodations, we need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. We want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support at 781-736-3470 or access@brandeis.edu.

**Written Assignment expectations:** Written assignments must be turned in by the deadlines established in the syllabus or in class. In the event of any extensions or postponements we will announce via email or in class any adjustments to the schedule. In the event of extenuating circumstances, such as illness, requiring an extension, we must be contacted at least 24 hours prior to the deadline in order to make necessary adjustments to the deadline.

**Assignment Formatting:** All written assignments must include the following: 12point font, One inch Margins on all sides, double spacing, and page numbers at the bottom centered. All quotes, paraphrasing, citations and bibliographies should rely on APA style (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/), which must include the author name, year, and page number in parenthesis, Ex. (Horton 2014: 234). All assignments will be submitted on the course website unless otherwise specified.

**Technology:** Please put your phones on silent before coming to class. We welcome laptops as a method of taking notes and following along with readings. However, please avoid using email, IM/DM, facebook, and other distractions while in class. Your class participation grade will suffer should this become an issue during the course of the semester.

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES**

**Presence and Participation/Weekly “Thinking Theory Response” (20%):** Participation means that you are attentively listening to other students, engaging with the course materials, and contributing to the class discussion. Again, this is a seminar-style course, where we will condense a significant amount of information into a semester. The participation of all students is integral to the successful execution of this course. Please read all the assigned readings for a given week and come to class prepared to discuss. Each week you will be responsible for handing in a “thinking theory” response in which you respond to the readings from the week. These should be no more than two double spaced pages. Your objective in this response is to articulate and evaluate the main intervention of at least one of the week’s readings.

**Research Positionality Statement (25%):** At the end of the semester, you will be responsible for producing an original research project that you will present to the public. The parameters of that project are open to you. However, in order to help you better explain and formulate your research agenda, you will be responsible for devising a statement to address your positionality vis-à-vis your research topic. A positionality statement is a written statement that expresses who you are, how you see and understand the world, and how the specific context of your life has shaped your worldview. In addition to this, your statement should also explore why you have chosen the topic you have for your final project and what your connection is to the material, if you share commonalities with the communities you intend to study, and what you hope to get out of your research. This statement should be reflexive about what you intend to study and why and should also draw on course readings to help you frame your response.
Key Terms Toolkits (25%): You will have a take home midterm exam. Instead of a traditional midterm consisting of a few essay questions, you will draw on course readings to develop a key term toolkit. You will choose 8 terms/concepts from our course discussion and write one page Wikipedia style entries on each term. Your job is to explain how you understand the term, what its origins are, how others have used it, and how you intend to use it moving forward in your own project.

Final Project and Presentation (30%): For your final assignment, you will delve deeper into a research topic of your choice. The expectation is for you to take one of our major theoretical concepts offered in the course and to use it as a way to think through a more contemporary moment, text, current event, media artifact, etc. Your paper will need to be about 8-10 pages. You will turn in a brief abstract of your final paper. We will provide feedback as well as meet with you all individually to talk more about your assignments. This project is an opportunity to demonstrate your cultural analysis skills as well as your original ideas about a relevant topic. The assignment, will be scaffolded with an abstract due for feedback, an annotated bibliography, a workshoped version that you will share with peers and then the final product. In addition to a final document to submit to us we will also hold a public presentation so that you may showcase your work and your ideas to the larger Brandeis community.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Thursday September 3rd Introduction and Syllabus

UNIT 1 WHICH BODIES COUNT AS THEORY?

Tuesday September 8th Bodies Awaiting a Verb
Hortense Spillers (1987), Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book

Thursday September 10th Counting the Erotic
Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Black Feminist Thought

Tuesday September 15th Camp Exclusions
Susan Sontag (1964) “Notes on Camp”
View Camp: Notes on Fashion from the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Thursday September 17th Quare(ing) Queer Studies
E. Patrick Johnson (2001), “‘Quare’ Studies, or, everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother”

Tuesday September 22nd Challenging Categories
David Valentine (2007), Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography as a Category [Excerpts]

Thursday September 24th Effeminate Erotics
Tan Hoang Nguyen (2014), A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation [Excerpts]
DUE: Research Positionality Statement

Tuesday September 29th On Being Caught Up: Queering Settlement
Thursday October 1st Being Area Studied

Tuesday October 6th Queer Theory, Not Just A Western Construct
Petrus Liu (2015), *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* [Excerpts]

Thursday October 8th Queer Concepts and Anti-Elitism
Matt Brim (2020) *Poor Queer Studies: Confronting Elitism in the University* [Excerpts]

Tuesday October 13th On Queer Use
Sarah Ahmed (2019) *What’s the Use: On the Uses of Use* [Excerpts]

Thursday October 15th Midterm
Key Terms Toolkit Instructions Handed Out and In-Class Check-in

Tuesday October 20th Trans Performance Art as Theory
Jian Neo Chen (2019), *Trans Exploits: Trans of Color Cultures and Technologies in Movement* [Excerpts]
Key Terms ToolKit DUE @Noon

Thursday October 22nd Critical Erasures
C. Riley Snorton (2017), *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* [Pt 1]

Tuesday October 27th Critical Fabulations
C. Riley Snorton (2017), *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* [Pt 2]

Alternative Reading

Thursday October 29th Fabulous! Thinking with Queer Aesthetics

UNIT 3 HOW IS THEORY MADE

Tuesday November 3rd: The Ephemera of Evidence
Wu Tsang (2012), *The Wildness* [Watch]

***Guest Lecture by Kareem Khubchandani/Dr. Lawhore Vagistan

Thursday November 5th Theorizing Refusal
Summer Kim Lee (2019). “Staying In: Mitski, Ocean Vuong, and Asian American Asociality”
Ocean Vuong (2018), *On Earth We Are Briefly Gorgeous*

Tuesday November 10th On Being Transformed
Adrienne Maree Brown (2017), *Emergent Strategy* [Excerpts]
Thursday November 12th On Transforming
Alok Vaid-Menon (2017), *Femme in Public*
Janet Mock (2014), *Redefining Realness* [Excerpts]

Tuesday November 17th Radical Thoughts Beyond “The Human”
Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2018), *M. Archive: After the End of the World* [Excerpts]

Thursday November 19th Thinking with Dispossession

Tuesday November 24th Read These Thoughts Like a Song, Never Theory
A. Revathi (2010), *The Truth About Me a Hijra Life Story* [Excerpts]
Omise’ke Natasha Tinsley (2018) *Ezili’s Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders* [Excerpts]

Thursday November 26th THANKSGIVING

Tuesday December 1st Presentations

Thursday December 3rd Presentations

Tuesday December 8th (Monday Schedule, no class)