

ENGL 4050.090/5050.090//RELS 4000.09/5101.093//WGST 4050.090/5050.090
QUEER THEORY
Wednesday, 6:30-9:15
Friday 122

Kent L. Brintnall, kbrintna@uncc.edu Office Hours: Tue., 4:30-6:00pm, or by appointment

hermaphrodite, epicene, androgyne, gynandroid, bisexual, homosexual; Lesbian; pervert, sodomist, sodomite; homo, queer, fairy, pansy, queen, nance, Nancy *or* nancy, Molly *or* molly, Miss Molly, betty, painted Willie, fag, fagot, flute [*all slang*]; *tertium quid* [L.], neither one thing nor the other.

monstrosity, monster, miscreation, abortion . . . , freak.

– *Roget's International Thesaurus* (1946)

Unlike gay identity, which . . . is . . . rooted in the positive fact of homosexual object-choice, queer identity need not be grounded in any positive truth or in any stable reality “Queer” does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is . . . *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence. “Queer,” then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative—a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels marginalized because of her or his sexual practices “Queer” . . . does not designate a class of already objectified pathologies or perversions; rather, it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance. It is from the eccentric positionality occupied by the queer subject that it may become possible to envision a variety of possibilities for reordering the relations among sexual behaviors, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logics of representation, modes of self-constitution, and practices of community—for restructuring, that is, the relations among power, truth, and desire.

– David Halperin, *Saint Foucault* (1995)

What's striking is the number and *difference* of the dimensions that “sexual identity” is supposed to organize into a seamless and univocal whole That's one of the things that “queer” can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically At the same time, a lot of the most exciting recent work around “queer” spins the term outward along dimensions that can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these *and other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses A hypothesis worth making explicit: that there are important senses in which “queer” can signify only *when attached to the first person*. One possible corollary: that what it takes—all it takes—to make the description “queer” a true one is the impulsion to use it in the first person.

– Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (1993)

Queerness . . . figures . . . the place of the social order's death drive Queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure Queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one.

– Lee Edelman, *No Future* (2004)

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Given the nature of this course, students will be required to read about, discuss and write about sexual identities, desires and practices, some of which may seem foreign, disturbing or even repellant. If such work will make you uncomfortable, you should not be in this class. Class discussion will focus on assigned texts. No student will be required to reveal their sexual identities, desires or practices, but some students may choose to do so. If such revelations will make you uncomfortable, or if you will be unable to engage the fact of sexual diversity in a respectful, mature manner, you should not be in this class.

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GENERAL RESPONSIBILITY

To succeed in this course, you must be proactive. This includes both doing the work outlined in the syllabus and taking initiative if problems arise. If you do not understand the material or my expectations, if life is impinging on you in some way, or if my teaching style is not working for you, please let me know. I will not always be able to solve the problem, but I am completely unable to provide a remedy if I do not know one is needed.

I want every student in this class to succeed. In selecting readings, crafting assignments, and setting a schedule, I have tried to create a framework that will help you do your best work. In presenting material, articulating expectations, and responding to assignments, I strive to be as clear as I can. I will not, however, hunt you down or pester you to make sure you are doing what is required.

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS

You are expected to (1) attend, and be on time for, all class meetings; (2) read carefully all assigned readings prior to the class session for which they are assigned; (3) participate actively and productively in class discussions; (4) be familiar with the syllabus; (5) take responsibility for fulfilling all course requirements; and (6) check your NinerMail account regularly for communications from the instructor.

You are **NOT** expected to agree with the views espoused by the instructor, the course materials or other students; you are expected to manage any disagreement respectfully and productively.

E-MAIL COMMUNICATION

I will communicate with you as a class and as individuals using your NinerMail (university e-mail) account. You are responsible for checking this account regularly and responding promptly to any requests. ***I will circulate readings for the course via e-mail. You are responsible for accessing these materials.***

ATTENDANCE

Students are expected to attend, and be on time for, all class meetings. ***Every absence after one, for whatever reason, will result in a five-point deduction from your final grade. Every two instances of arriving late or leaving early will count as one absence.*** If you are absent, you are responsible for getting any announcements, lecture notes, handouts or assignments.

The exception to this policy is absences necessitated by religious observance. You may miss two classes for religious observance, but you must provide me with written notice (which includes e-mail correspondence) of the class you will be missing for this reason no later than **Friday, January 25.**

ACCOMMODATION OF DISABILITIES

If you have a disability that qualifies you for accommodations, please provide a letter from Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more information regarding accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (www.ds.uncc.edu).

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Consistent with the University's commitment to inclusivity, I pledge to do my best to run the class in a manner that is respectful of difference, including but not limited to, physical and mental ability, age, socio-economic status, body size, religious identity, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and veteran status. You are expected to be respectful of these differences in your conduct in class and on campus.

As a sign of this respect, you should write in a way that recognizes diversity. In other words, you should, at the very least, use gender-inclusive language and strive to be mindful of metaphors that may have problematic racial, ethnic, class, sexual or (dis)ability connotations.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1999 [1990]).

Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977 [1975]).

Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978 [1976]).

Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2000 [1905]).

Additional readings will be made available via e-mail.

Please bring all readings to the relevant class session.

CLASS PREPARATION

Because this course focuses on close, critical analysis of difficult texts, you will need to devote sufficient time to preparing for class both to contribute to discussion and to do well on assignments. You must read carefully prior to class taking note of the ideas and questions you want to bring to our collective conversation. You should make sure, at a minimum, that you can summarize the author's main point(s), the evidence marshaled, the chief rhetorical strategies employed and any notable short-comings. You should familiarize yourself with new vocabulary and investigate the relevant historical, cultural and intellectual background.

Class sessions will be a combination of lecture, textual analysis and discussion. We will not have time to discuss fully all of the assigned reading during class time, but our collective consideration of the material will give you a basic understanding of the important ideas contained in these texts. Our consideration of specific passages and our discussion will give you practice engaging these texts, enhancing your ability to explore the materials more carefully and thoughtfully on your own. Our class meetings are an opportunity to try your hand at interpreting these materials, deepening your understanding of them, ask questions of them, and developing your own ideas in relation to them. Your written work provides the opportunity to demonstrate, develop and deepen this engagement. Most of the work of analyzing, evaluating, and engaging these materials will have to be done outside of class when you read, take notes and prepare your written assignments.

CLASS DECORUM

(1) Be on time for class. If you must arrive late or leave early, do so as unobtrusively as possible. (2) Strive to distract as little as possible from the business at hand: this includes eating and drinking, side conversations, getting situated at the beginning of class and after breaks, etc. (3) Phones should not be used *as phones* during class. If I observe you text-messaging during class, I may ask you to leave class and it will be counted as an absence. (4) Computers, electronic tablets and phones may be used during class only to take notes or read electronic readings. If I observe you using these devices for any other purpose, I may ask you to leave, it will be counted as an absence, ***and it will jeopardize use of such devices for the remainder of the semester for all students in the course.***

SCHEDULE

1.9 INTRODUCTION TO COURSE

Kent L. Brintnall, "Re-building Sodom and Gomorrah: The Monstrosity of Queer Desire in the Horror Film," *Culture and Religion* 5, no. 2 (2004): 145-60.

- 1.16 Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader*, 137-81 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011 [1982]).

Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," in *Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, ed. Robert J. Corber and Stephen Valocchi, 170-83 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003 [1998]).

Teresa de Lauretis, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities—An Introduction," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3, no. 2 (1991): iii-xviii.

David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz, "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?" *Social Text* 23, nos. 3-4 (2005): 2-17.

- 1.23 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1-90.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is about You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 123-52 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003 [1997]).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Making Gay Meanings" and "Thinking through Queer Theory," in *The Weather in Proust*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg, 183-203 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011 [2001, 2000]).

- 1.30 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 3-69, 195-308.

2.6 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*.

- 2.13 Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss, 13-31 (New York: Routledge, 1991).

Butler, *Gender Trouble*, vii-44.

2.20 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 45-100.

Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification," in *The Psychic Life of Power*, 132-50 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997 [1993]).

*****Last day to submit first expository essay.**

*****Graduate Students' Literature Reviews topics due by noon, Monday, February 25.**

2.27 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 101-90.

Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1-55, 223-42.

*****Last day to submit second expository essay.**

3.6 SPRING BREAK – No Class

3.13 Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*

Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. XXI, 152-57 (London: Hogarth, 1961 [1927]).

Sigmund Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. XIX, 173-82 (London: Hogarth, 1961 [1924]).

Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 29-50.

Bersani, *Homos*, 77-112

3.20 Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" "Sociability and Cruising," and "Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject," in *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays*, 3-30, 45-62, 139-53 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010 [1987, 2002, 2006]).

Bersani, *Homos*, 1-10, 31-76.

Leo Bersani, "The Power of Evil and the Power of Love," in *Intimacies*, Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, 57-87 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

- 3.27** Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis," and "The Signification of the Phallus," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink, 75-101, 575-84 (New York: Norton, 2006 [1949, 1948, 1958]).

Tim Dean, *Beyond Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 22-60, 215-280.

Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 176-212.

- 4.3** Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

*****First analytical paper due by noon, Friday, April 5.**

- 4.10** Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993 [1972]), 49-150.

*****One-sentence description of final paper topic due by 5PM, Monday, April 15.**

- 4.17** Workshop on Final Papers

*****Proposals for Final Papers due by noon, Friday, April 19.**

- 4.24** Lynne Huffer, *Mad for Foucault* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 122-86.

José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University, 2008), 1-32, 91-96.

Tim Dean, "An Impossible Embrace: Queerness, Futurity, and the Death Drive," in *A Time for the Humanities: Futurity and the Limits of Autonomy*, ed. James J. Bono, Tim Dean, and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, 122-245 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

*****Second analytical paper due by noon, Friday, April 26.**

*****Graduate Student Literature Review due by noon, Monday, May 6.**

FINAL EXAM MEETING: Wednesday, May 8, 8-10PM.

*****Final paper due by noon, Thursday, May 9.**

ASSIGNMENTS

You must submit all assignments by e-mail (kbrintna@uncc.edu). If I am unable to open your attachment, I will notify you. If you do not submit a readable version within 24 hours, I will grade the paper at my discretion. All assignments must be double-spaced, in a 12-point font, with one-inch margins and no extra spaces between paragraphs. ***No late papers will be accepted.***

Expository Papers

You must submit **two (2)** 2-3 page expository papers by **Wednesday, February 27**. You may only submit one expository paper a week. These papers should focus on a single reading and must be submitted before class on the day the reading is assigned. (For example, an expository essay on Gayle Rubin's essay "Thinking Sex" would be due before class on Wednesday, January 16.) These papers should summarize the reading's main idea and explain the argument that supports it. A strong expository paper will provide a concise, clear and complete summary of the author's most significant ideas. These papers should not move beyond summary to critique or interrogation; the skill you should be practicing is accurate and adequate explanation of an argument.

Analysis Papers

You must submit **two (2)** 4-6 page analysis papers after Spring Break. One of these papers is due no later than **noon, Friday, April 5**; the other is due no later than **noon, Friday, April 26**. These papers must do more than summarize the readings; they must develop an argument, raise a question, generate an idea or explain an insight in relation to the course materials. These papers may explain the value of an author's idea(s), express disagreement with an author's idea(s), or defend an author's approach against criticism. These papers may consider materials read at any point in the course. You must, however, select a topic that will allow you to give close, careful attention to texts and questions under discussion. You should use these analytical papers to develop ideas that you can explore more fully in your final paper. ***One of these papers must put the course materials in conversation with a news story from the past year. Students must provide a full citation to the news story in question.***

Final Paper

Undergraduates must write a final paper of 8-10 pages; graduate students must write a final paper of 15-20 pages. ***Proposals for the final paper are due by noon, Friday, April 19. Final papers are due by noon on Thursday, May 9.*** The final paper must frame an argument relevant to the course's themes and questions. You should not attempt to discuss all of the authors and readings considered in class; you should instead identify a specific idea, question or theme that is interesting to you and then develop it in relation to the most pertinent course materials. Although this paper may return to ideas explored in our analytical essays, it must be more than a summation of prior work.

Literature Review

Graduate students must submit an 8-10 page literature review of some clearly defined subset of materials that form a part of the academic field of queer theory. These reviews must focus on a strain of queer theory not considered in the course—for example, transgender studies, queer of color critique, queer temporality, queer theory and religion. Graduate students will need to explore secondary literature in the field to identify a suitable conversation and the materials that comprise it. The literature review must provide an overview of the character, contributions and development of this subfield as well as adequate summaries of the most significant texts within it. ***Graduate students must submit a description of the topic of their literature review to the professor by e-mail by noon on Monday, February 25. These reviews are by noon on Monday, May 6. Graduate students will give oral presentations about their reviews at the final exam session on Wednesday, May 8.***

GRADING

In grading your assignments, I will use the following criteria:

- (1) Is the work satisfactory as an *expository* exercise? Does it summarize accurately the material under consideration? Does it give attention to the most relevant and important ideas? Does it characterize fairly and engage sympathetically ideas with which it disagrees? Does it consider a sufficient range of sources?
- (2) Is the work satisfactory as an *analytical* exercise? Does it have a clear thesis or central claim(s)? Is it expressed and organized in a persuasive manner? Does it evince intellectual engagement beyond summation and exposition? Does it engage questions, themes and ideas relevant to the course? Does it extend consideration of course materials beyond class discussion?
- (3) Is the work satisfactory as a *writing* exercise? Is it free of grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors? Does it provide accurate and adequate citations? Does it demonstrate attention to rhetorical stylization?

Ideally, your work will open up some new dimension of—i.e., teach me something about—the material. At a minimum, it must summarize the materials accurately, clearly and completely and present an analysis (evaluation, critique, application, extension) that engages the course's themes and questions.

Ideally, your writing will be absolutely free of spelling, grammar, stylistic and citation mistakes. Your reader cannot engage your ideas if she or he is distracted by problems in your writing. ***If I find myself spending too much time copy-editing your work, I will deduct a letter grade, return it without comment and give you 24 hours to submit a revised version. If I find spelling errors that could have been caught by spell-check, I will give the paper a U and return it without comment.***

You must follow Kate L. Turabian's *Manual of Style*, 7th ed., or the *MLA Style Manual*, 7th ed., for questions of grammar, style and citation form.

Two additional style rules that apply to assignments for this course:

- (1) Do not use "you" in formal writing.
Incorrect: "This passage in Irigaray makes you aware of your body."
Correct: "This passage in Irigaray makes the reader aware of her body."
(Note that this version forces the writer to think about the identity of the reader: would male-identified readers have the same bodily experience as female-identified readers?)
- (2) Do not use contractions in formal writing.

Your writing should privilege depth over breadth. It is better to address a small point, and do it well, than to try something grand, and do it superficially. There is no expectation, in this class or the world, that you be exhaustive. Instead, you should frame a question well, engage texts attentively, represent others' ideas accurately, explain your own thinking clearly, and write in an engaging, rhetorically sensitive manner.

You should consider issues beyond proofreading and clarity of expression. You should also think about form and style. You should be attentive to how you organize an essay, how you begin and end a paper, how you express yourself (from word choice to examples to quotations to metaphors), and how you vary the length and complexity of sentences and paragraphs. While I do not expect you to imitate the style(s) of authors from this course in any specific way, you should pay attention to what you like and dislike in their writing, what you think works and what you think fails, and try to incorporate that knowledge into your own writing. In other words, you should read course materials not only to gain ideas, but also to glean insights about how you want to express ideas.

Remember, you will not be in the room when I am reading your work: what you put on the page must be a clear, complete and precise statement of your ideas.

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You should familiarize yourself with and conform your conduct to the University's Code of Student Academic Integrity. Plagiarism on any assignment will result in a failing grade for the course.

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GRADE BREAKDOWN

Undergraduates

Expository Papers: 20%
Analysis Papers: 40%
Final paper: 40%

Graduate Students

Expository Papers: 10%
Analysis Papers: 20%
Final paper: 50%
Literature Review: 20%

GRADE DESCRIPTIONS

Grades are not a judgment on you. They are a way of communicating how one particular assignment reflects analytical skills and writing ability with respect to a specific set of materials and questions.

- A** Exceptional work. Evinces exhaustive preparation and thoughtful engagement in every aspect of the assignment. Careful, accurate, complete, sympathetic interpretation of material and presentation of ideas. General observations supported by specific, concrete detail. Contains a strong, clear thesis. Contributes something interesting, unique or creative beyond class discussion. Clear, well-organized writing free of grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- B** Strong work. Attentive to the most significant details of the material under consideration. Conversant with the course's themes and questions. Expresses an obvious main point. Presents a reasonable interpretation supported by sufficient evidence. Clear, well-organized writing free of serious grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- C** Acceptable work with some problems. May fail to attend to important features of the material under discussion. May fail to address the course's themes and questions. May have an unclear or unsupported thesis. Analysis may be too general or superficial. Writing may be unclear, disorganized or have numerous grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- D** Work with serious problems. Analysis is very general, gets significant details wrong, or ignores details that are inconsistent with the paper's main point. Discussion fails to engage the readings or the course's themes. Significant problems with clarity or organization. Significant issues with grammar, spelling or style. Repetition of errors noted in prior papers.
- F** Unacceptable work.

If you come to class, participate in discussion, demonstrate a commitment to doing well on your assignments and improve over the course of the semester, I will take that into consideration when translating your individual assignment grades into a course grade.

NOTE ON GRADES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

The range of grades used in graduate courses at UNC Charlotte is A (commendable), B (satisfactory), C (marginal), and U (unsatisfactory). Most A-level undergraduate work is B-level graduate work. At the graduate level, a B indicates you must refine and develop your skills to succeed in the academy. A C indicates serious deficiencies in the skills essential to success; it is the equivalent of a D or F in undergraduate study. One final grade of C automatically generates a written warning from the Graduate School Dean and may prevent you from pursuing further graduate work. A second C is sufficient grounds for permanent dismissal from the graduate program. The receipt of a single U in any graduate course while at UNC Charlotte results in immediate academic suspension, which effectively ends your graduate career at this institution.