

QUEERING THEORY **GWSS 4403**

Spring 2008

Wednesdays 6:20-8:50

Blog Address: <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/gwss4403/>

Instructor: Dr. Sara L. Puotinen

Office Hours: Mondays 4-6

Office Location: FORD

Email: puot0002@umn.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Tracing the work of Judith Butler, from *Gender Trouble* to *Undoing Gender*, this upper level seminar explores Butler's impact on queer theory and her queering of gender, identity, activism, resistance and ethics. In addition to using some primary texts by Butler, this course includes several of her interviews, the recent documentary on her life and work, and readings both inspired by and critical of her work.

Some questions we will explore this semester include:

1. How does Butler engage in queering theory?
2. How has Butler's understanding and promotion of queer(ing) theory changed since the writing of *Gender Trouble* in 1990?
3. What are the limits and possibilities of Butler's idea of performing gender for queer and feminist politics?
4. What does it mean to trouble gender? Who can trouble gender? When is troubling gender subverting dominant norms and when is it merely reinforcing those norms?
5. Is Butler's turn to ethics representative of a larger shift in queer theory?
6. What are the political and ethical possibilities of queering theory?
7. What is (should be) the relationship between queer theory/queer communities and other theories/movements like feminism?
8. Is Butler a "bad writer" or a difficult writer? What (if anything) is important about distinguishing between bad and difficult writing?
9. Is queer theory a matter of doing or being? Can it be both?

COURSE GOALS

- To explore the work of Judith Butler and her importance for queer, feminist and critical theory.
- To use Butler as a lens for exploring queer theory as an important intervention in both feminist and gay/lesbian theory, politics and ethics.
- To gain an understanding of some key concepts, critiques and figures within queer theory.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Attend Class Regularly. You are allowed to have **one unexcused absence** during this semester. You are responsible for contacting other students to get any notes, handouts or information on assignments that you might have missed.

Let me know if you have any problems. If at any point throughout the semester you have questions or concerns about this course, please know that you are more than welcome to make an appointment to meet with me. If you would like to meet to discuss a grade that you received, please email me with your questions or concerns and return your graded assignment to me at least one day in advance of our meeting. This will enable me to give you the best possible feedback.

Be an active participant in the class. Remember that everyone helps to shape the class. Your participation does make a difference. To that end, you are responsible for coming to class fully prepared (with fully read texts in hand), actively and respectfully contributing to discussions, asking questions when you don't understand the material and giving feedback to the instructor on what is working and not working in the class.

Turn your assignments in on time. All written assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified in this syllabus. I will only accept late papers under special circumstances.

OTHER COURSE INFORMATION

Academic Dishonesty

This includes cheating on assignments, plagiarizing (misrepresenting as your own work any work that has been written by another author), and submitting the same paper or substantially similar paper to meet the requirements of more than one course without the approval of all the instructors concerned. The instructor will report such dishonesty. It is grounds for failure in the course.

Disability Services

Students with disabilities who require accommodations in meeting course requirements should meet with me as early as possible in the term. Class materials, including this syllabus, can be made available in alternative formats upon request. It is your responsibility to provide documentation from Disability Services to receive accommodations.

Non-native English Speakers and Writers

If you need some extra assistance with the reading and writing assignments, please contact me early in the term.

U of M Harassment Policy

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status,

veteran status, or sexual orientation. For further information, call the University Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 418 Morrill Hall, 624-9547.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Group Presentation

40%

You and 1-2 other people are required to give a 40 minute presentation on a topic related to queering theory and Judith Butler. As part of this presentation, you will do extensive research on the topic and develop an annotated bibliography with at least 6 sources. Your grade will be based on content/creativity/effectiveness of your presentation, a 2 page summary of your findings, and an annotated bibliography. The general topics for the presentation are: (1) sex/gender system, (2) Drag queens/drag kings, (3) Transgender and Intersex rights, (4) History of Identity Politics, (5) Queer Activism, (6) the Intellectual Roots of Queering Theory: Radical Democracy, Frankfurt Critical Theory, Michel Foucault and/or Friedrich Nietzsche and (7) Transnationalism, Queer Theory and Human Rights. A more detailed handout and sign-up sheet will be distributed in the next few weeks.

2. Paper(s)

40%

You may choose one of the following options for this assignment:

- a. Write a 12-15 page paper on a topic related to Judith Butler and/or Queering Theory. This paper requires that you do outside research about your topic and that you include at least 5 additional sources, that is 5 texts/readings that we do not discuss/read in class (internet sites may be used but do not count as part of the 5 sources required). In addition to the paper, you must submit a 250 word abstract with tentative bibliography and meet with me to discuss your topic. The abstract/bibliography will be due on March 26. The final paper will be due on April 30.
- b. Write three shorter analysis papers (5 pages) on three of the five major Butler topic of this course (queering gender, identity, activism, resistance or ethics). While this option does not require that you do outside research (like option a), it does require that you critically engage with the readings and our class discussions. In each of your three papers, you must draw upon our class discussions and at least four of the texts. Each of your papers will be due the week after your chosen section. For example, if you chose to write on queering gender, your paper would be due on April 2.

3. Attendance and Participation

20%

You are required to attend class regularly and contribute to class discussions. More than one unexcused absence will lower your class participation grade. For each class, you must come prepared, having read and taken notes on the assigned materials.

CLA GRADING CRITERIA

- A achievement outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements
- B achievement significantly above that level necessary to meet course requirements
- C achievement meeting the basic course requirements in every respect
- D achievement worthy of credit even though it does not meet the basic requirements

- F performance failing to meet the basic course requirements
- S equivalent to a grade of C or better

COURSE READINGS

Textbooks:

Wilchins, Riki. *Queer Theory/Gender Theory: An Instant Primer*
Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender* (UG)

Other Readings: Available online (ONLINE), in the course packet from Paradigm Copies in the dinkydome (CP), or as a handout (HANDOUT)

COURSE SCHEDULE:

(Subject to change)

INTRODUCTIONS

January

23 Introduction to Class

30 What is Queer Theory, part I?

READING:

- a. Wilchins, Rita. *Queer Theory/Gender Theory: An Instant Primer*

February

6 What is Queer Theory, part II?

READING:

- a. Jagose, Annamarie. "Queer" (LINK)
<http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-Dec-1996/jagose.html>
- b. Sullivan, Nikki. Excerpt from "Queer: A Question of Being or Doing?" (HANDOUT)
- c. "Introduction" in *Queer Ideas* (HANDOUT)

Introduction to Judith Butler as Queer Theorist

13 Judith Butler: There is a Person Here

READINGS:

- a. Butler, Judith. "Preface (1999)" in *Gender Trouble* (HANDOUT)

FILM: Judith Butler: *Philosophical Encounters of the Third Kind*

20 Queer Theory as Making Trouble and Being Difficult

READING:

- a. Butler, Judith. "A Bad Writer Writes Back" (HANDOUT)
- b. Butler, Judith. Excerpt from "Value of Difficulty" (CP)

- c. Salih, Sara. "Judith Butler and the Ethics of Difficulty" in *The Critical Quarterly*. October 2003 Vol 45 no 3 (E JOURNALS)
- d. Interview with Judith Butler. "Changing the Subject" in *jac* (E JOURNALS)

27 The text that started it all: Gender Trouble

READINGS:

- a. Butler, Judith. "Preface (1990)" in *Gender Trouble* (HANDOUT)
- b. Osbourne, Peter and Lynne Segal. Excerpts from "Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler" (LINK)
<http://www.theory.org.uk/but-int1.htm>
- c. Roden, Frederick S. "Becoming Butlerian: On the Discursive Limits (and Potentials) of Gender Trouble" (CP)
- d. "Interview with Judith Butler: Gender Trouble Still Revolutionary or Obsolete?" (LINK)
http://www.ilga.org/news_results.asp?FileCategory=6&ZoneID=7&FileID=1097

THE BUTLER DID IT: JUDITH BUTLER'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO QUEER THEORY

March

5 Queering Gender: Sex/Gender, Sexuality and Desire

READING:

- 1. Butler, Judith. Brief excerpt from *Gender Trouble* (HANDOUT)
- 2. Loyd, Moya. "Rethinking the Sex/Gender System" (CP)
- 3. Laquer, Thomas. "Orgasm, Generation and the Politics of Reproductive Biology" in *Representations* Spring 1986 (E JOURNALS)
- 4. Martin, Biddy. "Sexualities without Genders and other Queer Utopias" in *Diacritics* Vol 24 2/3. (E JOURNALS)
- 5. Bornstein, Kate. Excerpts from *Gender Outlaw* (CP)
- 6. Kessler, Suzanne J. and Wendy McKenna. "Toward a Theory of Gender" in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (CP)

GROUP PRESENTATION

12 Queering Gender: Drag

READING:

- 1. Butler, Judith. Excerpt from "Gender is Burning" (HANDOUT)
- 2. Butler, Judith. Excerpt from *Gender Trouble* (HANDOUT)
- 3. Harper, Philip Brian. "The subversive edge": Paris is Burning, Social Critique, and the limits of subjective agency" in *Diacritics*. Vol 24 2/3. (E JOURNALS)
- 4. hooks, bell. "Is Paris Burning?" (CP)
- 5. Newton, Esther. "Selection from Mother Camp" in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (CP)

FILM: clips from Paris is Burning

GROUP PRESENTATION

19 SPRING BREAK

26 Queering Gender: Beyond Drag

READING:

1. Butler, Judith. "Doing Justice to Someone" (UG)
2. Namaste, Vivian. "Tragic Misreadings: Queer Theory's Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity" in *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (CP)
3. Stryker, Susan. "The Transgender Issue: An Introduction" in *GLQ 1998 Vol 4, 2* (E JOURNALS)
4. Chase, Cheryl. "Hermaphrodites with Attitude: Mapping the Emergence of Intersex Political Activism" in *GLQ 1998 Vol 4, 2* (E JOURNALS)
5. Prosser, Jay. "Judith Butler: Queer Feminism, Transgender, and The Transubstantiation of Sex" in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (CP)

If you have chosen to write the research paper, your abstract is due today.

GROUP PRESENTATION

April

2 Queering Identity: Identity Politics and its Problems

1. Butler, Judith. "Critically Queer" (HANDOUT)
2. Lehr, Valerie. "Radical Democracy and Queer Identity" (CP)
3. Jagose, Annamarie. "Contestations of Queer" (CP)
4. Anzaldúa, Gloria. "To (o) Queer the Writer" (CP)
5. Selfa, Lance. "What's Wrong with 'Identity Politics'" (CP)
6. Butler, Judith. "Gender Imitation and Insubordination" (CP)

If you have chosen to write a smaller paper on queering gender, it is due today.

GROUP PRESENTATION

9 Queering Activism: Parody as Politics?

READING:

1. Butler, Judith. "From Politics to Parody" (TBA)
2. Nussbaum, Martha. "The Professor of Parody" (LINK)
<http://www.akad.se/Nussbaum.pdf>
3. Butler, Judith. "Merely Cultural" in *Social Text*, No. 52/53, (E JOURNALS)
4. Fraser, Nancy. "Response to Judith Butler" in *Social Text*, No. 52/53 (E JOURNALS)
5. Duggan, Lisa. "Theory in Practice: The Theory Wars or Whose Afraid of Judith Butler?" in *Journal of Women's History* Spring 1998 Vol 10 no 1 (E JOURNALS)

If you have chosen to write a smaller paper on queering identity, it is due today.

GROUP PRESENTATION

16 Queering Resistance: Critically Thinking as Activism

READING:

1. Butler, Judith. "End of Sexual Difference?" (UG)
2. Butler, Judith. Excerpt from Contingency, Hegemony, Universality (HANDOUT)
3. Butler, Judith. Excerpt from "Violence, Mourning, Politics" (HANDOUT)
4. Nowlan, Robert Andrew. "Critique as Radical Praxis," in *The Material Queer* (CP)

If you have chosen to write a smaller paper on queering activism, it is due today.

GROUP PRESENTATION

23 Queering Ethics: Bad Air!

READING:

1. Butler, Judith. "Ethical Ambivalence" (CP)
2. Butler, Judith. "Gender Regulations" (UG)
3. Jakobsen, Janet. "Queer is? Queer Does?" in *GLQ 1998 Vol 4 no 4*(E JOURNALS)

If you have chosen to write a smaller paper on queering resistance, it is due today.

30 Queering Ethics: The Livable Life

READING:

1. Butler, Judith. "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy" (UG)
2. Butler, Judith. "The Question of Sexual Transformation" (UG)
3. Butler, Judith. "Global Violence, Sexual Politics" in *Queer Ideas* (TBA)

GROUP PRESENTATION

May

7 FINAL DAY OF CLASS

If you have chosen to write a smaller paper on queering ethics, it is due today.

If you have chosen to write the research paper, it is due today.