“Queer Theories: Making Sexuality Up And/Or Look At What You’ve Become”

LIT 125BS-01

SXL 140S-01

WOMENST 170AS-01

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Spring 2012: Tuesdays-Thursdays, 2:50-4:05 p.m. in Carr 136

Office hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays: 1:30-2:30 p.m.

“Queer Theories: Making Sexuality Up And/Or Look At What You’ve Become”

This seminar will introduce students to a field of critical inquiry that has been named “queer theory.” Although we’ll be accepting the routine time line that keys 1990 as the year of queer theory’s “birth,” we will begin with Michel Foucault’s 1976-1977 *History of Sexuality, Volume One* given how its historicization of the object, “sexuality” in myriad scientific, cultural, and psychiatric discourses has been so generative for “queer theory”’s treatment of the object of sexuality. We will follow our reading of Foucault’s text with Sigmund Freud’s 1905 *Three Essays on a Theory of Sexuality* because of the important although sometimes neglected ways in which this text informs the anti-identitarian and anti-heteronormative claims of queer theory. In many ways the seminar will deploy Foucault’s and Freud’s different analyses and histories of “sexuality” as two poles around which we might situate the texts published during what is considered the birth date of queer theory, 1990 by Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and the many texts that come after that draw from history and psychoanalysis. (Of course, we will also debate the use of this type of framework, i.e., these two poles, for the purposes of making sense of queer theory; it’s intended as a heuristic device not a totem.) Generally, the course will try to attend to the institutional trajectory of “queer theory” in U.S. academia over the years as well consider how its originally anti-identitarian impulses have been mined and/or ignored by forms of rights discourses ostensibly organized around minoritized sexual identities.

I see two fundamental questions at stake for us as we make our way through the readings that are inspired by arguments put forth in Adam Phillips’s essay, “Desiring By Myself”: whether “sexuality” is to be considered part of our “sociability,” or whether there is something about sexuality that is, in fact, averse to what we consider as the consensual and the shared. Queer theory can be interpreted as having over the years answered “yes” in a somewhat contradictory fashion to both of these questions, sometimes at the same time. What’s at stake institutionally, legally, politically, affectively, culturally, etc., when one answers “yes” or “no” to these questions? What presuppositions about “sexuality” as an object for knowledge that purportedly describe something about the individual, the social, the political, the legibility of certain forms of social bond, etc. have changed, remained the same in queer theory over the years and how do we understand those changes or lack there of historically?

Requirements:

Since this is a seminar, class participation and sustained engagement are necessary to make it work for all of us. You will be required to submit a 15-20-page research paper due on May 6, 2012 by 7 a.m. and take two quizzes on the readings and discussions and do one oral presentation in teams of 2 or 3. Your final grade will be calculated as follows: 60% Papers, 30% Quizzes, 10% Presentation.

Attendance policy:

Every absence from this course must be cleared and/or discussed with me via email before the fact or right after the fact. There are only 3 excused absences allowed for the entire semester. On the occasion of your 4th absence (and each one subsequent to that) your final letter grade for the course will begin to go down by a ½ grade for each absence: A- to B+ to B to B- to C+, etc.

Readings:

The texts will be available at The Regulator Bookstore on 9th Street in Durham. Any other assigned readings marked by an \* will be distributed in class or posted to Blackboard. I urge you to bring to my/our attention any readings you think might supplement what has already been assigned.

Class Schedule:

January 17: Introduction

January 19:

1. Adam Phillips, \*“Desiring by Myself” & \*”Bored with Sex?”

2. Michael Warner, \*“Queer and Then”

January 24, 26:

1. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*

January 31 & February 2:

1. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Volume One*

February 14, 16:

1. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, \*”Introduction: Axiomatic” (from *Epistemology of the Closet*) & \*“Queer and Now” (from *Tendencies*)

February 21:

1. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*

February 23: no class scheduled for today

February 28:

1. Butler, *Gender Trouble*

March 1: Quiz #1 in class

March 6, 8: Spring break

March 13, 15:

1. Judith Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*

March 20, 22:

1. Jose Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*

March 27, 29:

1. Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*

April 3, 5:

1. Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*

April 10, 12:

1. Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*

April 17, 19:

1. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

April 24: Quiz #2 in class

May 6, 2012 at 7 a.m.: Final research papers are due