

Bonnie “Bo” Ruberg, PhD (they/them) // bruberg@uci.edu  
Assistant Professor, Department of Film and Media Studies  
Office hours: Mondays 1:00 - 3:00 or by appointment; [schedule here](#)

## **VS 295 “Queer Theory and Media Studies” (or “Queer Theory and Methods”)**

Fall 2020, Wednesday 12:00 - 2:50, synchronous meetings via Zoom

### **Course description**

This course introduces graduate students to a range of queer theory texts, concepts, and methods, with a focus on how queer theory relates to the study of media and how to “do” the work of queer theory. Across its history, queer theory has had close ties to film, literature, and the arts; increasingly, queer theory is looking to popular culture and digital media. In this class, we cover both canonical queer theory and works that complicate and challenge this canon, looking at queer of color theory, crip theory, transgender studies, queer theories of technology, and new work in the field. We will also explore how queer theory blurs divides between research and praxis, inspiring us to bring creativity, affect, embodiment, and activism into our scholarship. This course is designed to welcome graduate students from across disciplines. It simultaneously serves as an introduction for students who are new to queer theory and an opportunity to deepen and productively complicate queer thinking for students who are already well-reversed in these areas.

This is an immensely challenging time for many students. First and foremost, this course is designed to serve you and your learning. I am always happy to discuss accommodations and alternative approaches to your work, whether in class as a group or individually. My goal is to foster a supportive, thoughtful, collaborative environment where you can feel your needs are met and your voice is valued.

### **Synchronous sessions (logistics & protocol):**

Our class is scheduled to meet from **12:00 - 2:50 pm PST on Wednesdays**. We will be meeting synchronously during that time via **Zoom**. If you are able, you are strongly encouraged to attend these synchronous meetings. If you have conflicting responsibilities, unreliable access to the internet, are in a different time zone, etc., I am happy to make accommodations so that you can participate asynchronously. Note: If you are caring for a child or another person and would still like to join the synchronous meeting, you are very welcome to do so. If you expect that you will not be able to attend the synchronous meetings, please send me an email so we can figure out a plan that works for you.

Distance learning, and Zoom in particular, is hard on our bodies. For that reason, we'll be taking a number of measures to make our time together comfortable and sustainable. We'll take 10 minutes breaks for every 50 minutes we meet (so 10 minutes at the end of every hour). You are encouraged to have your camera on during class to facilitate discussion and connection, but this is not a requirement. You are always welcome to step away to use the bathroom, stretch, etc. Please feel free to eat during class, wear PJs, hang out with your pet - whatever works for you.

### **Participation and assignments:**

Your work in this class will consist of reading queer theory texts, thinking about them and writing notes about them, discussing them with your classmates, and practicing putting queer theory into action in your own scholarship or creative practice.

To foster participation, we will use a combination of pre-writing, small group discussion, and full group discussion. The hope is that this allows you to participate and learn in the way that best fits you, and gives you the chance to approach challenging course material from multiple perspectives.

Traditionally, a graduate seminar would culminate with each student writing an original research paper. In this class, many of you come from different backgrounds and are at different stages in your grad school careers. Therefore, in consultation with me, **each student can decide on the format and scope of their own final project**. Alternatively, given current circumstances, students may decide to opt out of the final project with no adverse effect to their grade.

You will be expected to complete the following assignments over the course of the quarter. If any of these feel overly burdensome or otherwise do not work for you, please feel free to let me know and we will work out an alternative plan:

- *Weekly readings*: Approximately 3 article-length works a week. On the schedule below, you will see that each week has an alternate reading. This is an optional text you can choose to read--for example, if you've already read one of the texts for the week and want to swap in a new reading
- *Weekly reading notes*: For at least 2 (of 3) readings per week, you should fill out a set of reading notes, following [this template](#). This will help you build a repository of knowledge for your future work; it also helps me prepare to teach class in a way that best fits your needs and interests. Please complete reading notes by **9:00 am on Wednesdays** (i.e. 3 hours before class begins) and place them into your individual student subfolder in Google drive.
- *Final projects*: Students are encouraged to complete a final project for our course that draws or builds from our readings and discussions. This can be a traditional academic essay, a piece of creative work, or any other form of professional production you feel supports your scholarly growth. If you believe completing a final project will not be logistically viable for you or will support your learning goals, please contact me to discuss opting out of the final project.
- *Lead-up to final projects*: There are a few additional small assignments on our schedule (below) designed to help you select and begin work on a final project.

**Course materials:**

All readings can be found online as PDFs in our [readings folder on Google Drive](#), which is broken down by week. There are no materials to purchase for this course.

**Grades:**

Students who complete the majority of work in this course and demonstrate meaningful engagement with the materials can expect to receive an A. If you are concerned about your grade or want to discuss alternative ways of completing course assignments, please feel free to contact me.

## SCHEDULE & READINGS

For folks who are new to queer studies, who find it challenging to read long texts, or who are visual learners, consider checking out *Queer: A Graphic History* (2016). It's an intro to queer issues and queer theory in graphic novel format. It's super approachable and actually pretty good for getting oriented!

**WEEK 1** (Wednesday, October 7)

### What is queerness? What is queer theory?

- Karen Tongson, "Queer," from *Keywords for Media Studies* (2017)
- Lisa Nakamura, "Media," from *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (2014)
- Judith Butler, "Critically Queer" (1993)
- David L. Eng, Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?" (2005)
- *Optional alternate reading:* Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public" (1998)

**WEEK 2** (Wednesday, October 14)

### The political roots of queer studies

- "The Combahee River Collective Statement" (1977)
- Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex" (1984)
- Cathy Cohen (1997), "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ* 3.4, 437-465
- *Optional alternate reading:* Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic" (1984)

**WEEK 3** (Wednesday, October 21)

### Understanding media queerly

- D. A. Miller, "Anal Rope" (1990)
- Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (1993): "Introduction: What Makes Queerness Most?" and chapter 1 "There's Something Queer Here"
- Eve Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is about You" (2003)
- *Optional alternate reading:* D.A. Miller, "Hitchcock's Hidden Pictures" (2010)

**WEEK 4** (Wednesday, October 28)

### Queer temporalities, queer futures

- Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004): "The Future Is Kid Stuff"
- José Muñoz, *Cruizing Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009): "Introduction: Feeling Utopia"
- Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010): "Preface" and "Introduction: Queer and Not Now"

- *Optional alternate reading:* Alexis Lothian, *Old Futures: Speculative Fiction and Queer Possibility* (2018), "Introduction: The Future's Queer Histories"

**WEEK 5** (Wednesday, November 4)

- No new readings; simply \*come prepared to discuss initial ideas for a final project\*

**WEEK 6** (Wednesday, November 11) - \*note: today's class is optional because it is Veteran's Day\*  
**Queer feeling**

- Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), "Introduction: Find Your Way"
- Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), "Introduction: Low Theory"
- Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering* (2012), "Chapter 3. Queer Animality"
  - *Optional alternate reading:* Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003), "Introduction"

**WEEK 7** (Wednesday, November 18)

**(Dis)Identification**

- José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999), "Introduction: Performing Disidentifications"
- Karen Tongson, *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries* (2011), "Chapter 3. Behind the Orange Curtain"
- Sami Schalk, "Coming to Claim Crip: Disidentification with/in Disability Studies" (2013)
  - *Optional alternate reading:* Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013), "Introduction"

\*Final project prospectus due\*

**WEEK 8** (Wednesday, November 25)

**Trans Studies**

- Susan Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" (1994)
- Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017), "Introduction"
- Cael M. Keegan (2018), "Getting Disciplined: What's Trans\* About Queer Studies Now?" (2018)
  - *Optional alternate reading:* micha cárdenas, "Pregnancy: Reproductive Futures in Trans of Color Feminism" (2016)

**WEEK 9** (Wednesday, December 2)

**Queer methods**

- All three readings this week are from *Imagining Queer Methods*, edited by Amin Ghaziani and Matt Brim (2019):
  - Heather Love, "'How the Other Half Things': An Introduction to the Volume"

- E. Patrick Johnson, "Put a Little Honey in My Sweet Tea: Oral History as Queer Performance"
- Petra L. Doan, "To Count or Not to Count: Queering Measurement and the Transgender Community"
  - *Optional alternate reading:* Karli June Cerankowski and Megan Milks, "New Orientations: Asexuality and Its Implications for Theory and Practice" (2010)

**WEEK 10 (Wednesday, December 9)**

**New Work in queer theory**

- Kara Keeling, "Queer Times, Black Futures" (2019)
- Matt Brim, *Poor Queer Studies* (2020), "Introduction: Queer Dinners"
- Cait McKinney, *Information Activism: A Queer History of Lesbian Media Technologies* (2020), "Chapter One: The Internet That Lesbians Built: Newsletter Networks"
  - *Optional alternate reading:* Jack Halberstam, *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (2020)