

CTCS 494: QUEER CINEMA



Instructor

Dr. Roxanne Samer
Email: samer@usc.edu
Office: SCA 215

Meeting Time

Thursdays 2-5:50pm in SCA 216
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-3pm and
Thursdays 1-2pm by appointment.
Please schedule all meetings via email at
least 24 hours in advance.

Course Description

This course offers students an overview of LGBT cinema from Production Code Era Hollywood to the present, while focusing on the emergence of queer cinema in the 1990s as a distinct cultural formation. We will begin by screening Todd Haynes' *Carol* (2015), discussing why one might make this film now. How do both history and the contemporary moment permeate its aesthetics? What, if anything, is "queer" about *Carol*? The film will then serve as an anchor as we explore theories of 1940s and 50s gay and lesbian spectatorship; the history of early gay and lesbian documentary and avant-garde productions; the emergence of New Queer Cinema across 1990s international film festivals; and NQC's formal and political lineages in contemporary global cinema. We will examine this body of films from a variety of perspectives, including contextualizing histories of political activism, academic theories of gender and sexuality, and shifts in technologies and their attendant aesthetics. Over the course of the semester, students will be asked to consider when, how, and why it might be best to distinguish between "queer," "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," and "transgender." We will also discuss the varying potentials of fiction and non-fiction films for different queer subjects at different times, and how queer diasporas have formed in and through film. No prior training in gender or sexuality studies is required. However, all students will be expected to discuss a range of representations of gender, race, and sexuality with respectfulness and consideration.

The primary goals of this class are to:

- ◆ INTERROGATE cinema's contributions to the construction of normative understandings of gender, race, and sexuality across the 20th and early 21st century;
- ◆ ANALYZE how queer audiences and filmmakers have articulated their own genders and sexualities in the face of cinematic and societal norms;
- ◆ and CRITICALLY ENGAGE with the institutions, scholarly discourses, and forms of political activism that have supported such efforts.

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation (10%): You are expected to attend every class meeting on time. Please come prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Good class participation involves contributing to the ongoing discussion in a responsible and informed manner, being attentive to that conversation, and being respectful of the participants in it.

Leading Discussion (10%): Each student will be expected to lead the discussion of one reading. In anticipation of your week, you should watch the film ahead of time and do the readings especially carefully. For the class itself, please prepare a 6-8 minute presentation, summarizing the reading's arguments and examples, as well as 3 discussion questions for the class. You will be able to sign-up your reading the first week of class.

Short Formal Analysis Paper (20%): After the first unit of the course, each student will write a 4-5 page analysis of one of the first three feature films we screen—*Carol*, *Rope* or *The Children's Hour*. Focus on either one scene from your chosen film or one formal element—editing, cinematography, sound, etc.—across the film. You should demonstrate your understanding of the readings thus far as well as make your own original argument about how the film works to do what it does with regard to gender and sexuality.

Video Essay (20%): For your next assignment, you will adapt your short formal analysis paper to an audiovisual medium. You may make adjustments to your ideas or argument based on feedback you received on your paper. However, you should largely be using the broad range of tools at your disposal to make your argument ever the more sound.

Final Paper (30%): At the end of the semester, each student will write an 8-10 page paper. Unlike the earlier paper, this will be a research paper. You must conduct your own research and draw on both primary and secondary sources. You may write about films we watched in the course, but you are encouraged to consider outside films. In either case, you should engage closely with the core theoretical and/or historical questions of the course. This paper is your opportunity to put your recently acquired knowledge of queer film history to use. It is also a chance to explore your own focused interests further.

Research Paper Proposal (10%): Four weeks before your research paper is due, you will submit a paper proposal and annotated bibliography with three to five sources.

All writing assignments are due via Turn It In on Blackboard. The video essays should be uploaded to Vimeo and emailed to the instructor (more detailed instructions forthcoming).

All assignments are due at the start of the class, unless noted otherwise.

Readings

Rich, B. Ruby. *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut*. Duke University Press, 2013.

Youmans, Greg. *Word Is Out: A Queer Film Classic*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2011.

All other readings will be available through Blackboard as PDFs.

All readings should be read prior to attending the class for which they are assigned, unless noted otherwise. We will be watching the films in class together. Screening attendance is mandatory.

Course Schedule

August 25: What is Queer Cinema?

Screening: *Carol* (Haynes, 2015).

Reading: Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," in *Bodies That Matter* (1993); and Patricia White, "Sketchy Lesbians: *Carol* as History and Fantasy" (2015).

UNIT I. Gay and Lesbian in Hollywood

September 1: Making Things Perfectly Queer

Screening: *Rope* (Hitchcock, 1948) and *Scorpio Rising* (Anger, 1963).

Reading: D.A. Miller, "Anal Rope" (1990); and Alexander Doty, "There's Something Queer Here," in *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (1990).

September 8: Reading the Codes

Screening: *The Children's Hour* (Wyler, 1961) and *Meeting of Two Queens* (Barriga, 1990).

Reading: Patricia White, "Reading the Code(s)" and "Lesbian Cinephilia," in *unInvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (1999).

UNIT II. Cinema After Stonewall

September 15: Documenting Gay and Lesbian Life

Screening: *Word Is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives* (Mariposa Film Group, 1977) and *Songs, Skits, Poetry, and Prison Life* (Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, 1974).

Reading: Greg Youmans, *Word Is Out: A Queer Film Classic* (2011).

Short Formal Analysis Paper Due

September 22: Lesbian Feminist Experimental Cinema

Screening: *Dyketactics* (Hammer, 1974); *Menses* (Hammer, 1974); *Superdyke* (Hammer, 1975); *Home Movie* (Oxenbergh, 1972); and *Damned If You Don't* (Friedrich, 1984)

Reading: B. Ruby Rich, "Before the Beginning: Lineages and Preconceptions," in *NQC* (2013); Barbara Hammer, "Lesbian Filmmaking: Self-Birthing" (1978) and "For An Active Cinema" (1981); Su Friedrich, "Does Radical Content Deserve Radical Form?" (1989); and Michelle Citron, "The Films of Jan Oxenbergh: Comic Critique" (March 1981).

September 29: Nation, Race, and AIDS in the 1980s

Screening: *Tongues Untied* (Riggs, 1989).

Reading: Ronald Gregg, “PBS and AIDS” (1992); and Marlon T. Riggs, “Black Macho Revisited: Reflections of a Snap! Queen” (1991).

UNIT III. New Queer Cinema

October 6: NQC Gets Its Name

Screening: *Looking For Langston* (Julien, 1989); *First Comes Love* (Friedrich, 1991); and *Me and Rubyfruit* (Benning, 1990).

Reading: B. Ruby Rich, “The New Queer Cinema: Director’s Cut,” in *NQC* (2013); and Chris Holmlund, “When Autobiography Meet Ethnography and Girl Meets Girl: The ‘Dyke Docs’ of Sadie Benning and Su Friedrich” (1997).

Rough Cut of Video Essay Due (screen in class)

October 13: The Black Imaginary and Regimes of Visibility

Screening: *The Watermelon Woman* (Dunye, 1996).

Reading: B. Ruby Rich, “Historical Fictions, Modern Desires: *The Watermelon Woman*,” in *NQC* (2013); Kara Keeling, “‘Joining the Lesbians’: Cinematic Regimes of Black Lesbian Visibility” (2005); and Manthia Diawara, “The Absent One: the Avant-Garde and the Black Imaginary in *Looking for Langston*” (1991).

October 20: A Queer Case Study: *Paris Is Burning*

Screening: *Paris is Burning* (Livingston, 1990).

Reading: bell hooks, “Is Paris Burning?” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992); Judith Butler, “Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion,” in *Bodies That Matter* (1993); and Jay Prosser, “Judith Butler, Queer Feminism, Transgender, and the Transubstantiation of Sex,” in *Second Skins* (1998).

October 27: Cinematic Diasporas

Screening: *Fire* (Mehta, 1996).

Reading: Gayatri Gopinath, “Local Sites/Global Contexts,” in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (2005).

Final Cut of Video Essay Due (screen in class)

UNIT IV. LGBT Cinema in the 21st Century

November 3: Nostalgia, Camp, and Auteurship

Screening: *Bad Education* (Almodóvar, 2004).

Reading: Marvin D’Lugo, “Postnostalgia in *Bad Education*” (2009); and Marsha Kinder, “All About the Brothers: Retroseriality in Almodóvar’s Cinema” (2009).

November 10: No Class (*Research Paper Proposals due at 6pm*)

Screening (on own outside of class): *The Kids Are All Right* (Chodolenko, 2010).

November 17: Homonormativity and Romance

Screening: *Weekend* (Haigh, 2011).

Reading: B. Ruby Rich, “What’s a Good Gay Film?” and “A Queer and Present Danger: The Death of New Queer Cinema?” in *NQC* (2013); Stephanie Clare, “(Homo)normativity’s Romance: Happiness and Indigestion in Andrew Haigh’s *Weekend*” (2013); and Jack Halberstam, “The Kids Aren’t Alright!” (2010).

November 24: No Class (Thanksgiving)

December 1: Queer Future Cinemas

Screening: *Tangerine* (Baker, 2015) and *Vow of Silence* (Steadwell, 2014).

Reading: “Queer Media Manifestos,” edited by Alexandra Juhasz and Ming-Yuen S. Ma, in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 19:4 (2013).

December 8: Research Paper Due at 6pm



This schedule is subject to change. Any changes will be announced ahead of time in class and on Blackboard.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism—presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words—is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in [SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards](#). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in [SCampus](#) and university policies on scientific misconduct.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the [Office of Equity and Diversity](#) or to the [Department of Public Safety](#). This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community—such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member—can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. [Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services](#) provide 24/7 confidential support, and the [Sexual Assault Resource Center webpage](#) describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the [American Language Institute](#), which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. [The Office of Disability Services and Programs](#) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, [USC Emergency Information](#) will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Course Exam, Project and Paper Retention Policy

It is the responsibility of all students in Cinema and Media Studies courses to retrieve all papers, projects, assignments and/or exams within one academic year of completion of a course. These records may be essential in resolving grade disputes and incompletes as well as assist in verifying that course requirements have been met. The Division of Cinema and Media Studies will dispose of all records from the previous academic year in May of the current academic year.

Computer and Phone Policy

Students may use laptop computers and tablets to take notes. All phones must be put away for the duration of the class. Should students begin to abuse their laptop privileges, I will ban all devices from the classroom. Please use your devices in a courteous manner.