



SCRN 288: GENDER AND FILM SPRING 2022

SEMINAR: THURSDAYS, 2:50-5:50, TC 112

SCREENINGS: THURSDAYS, 7:15-9:45, RAZZO HALL

PROF. ROX SAMER (THEY/THEM)

EMAIL: RSAMER@CLARKU.EDU (DIRECTLY, NOT VIA CANVAS)

OFFICE HOURS: TUESDAYS, 12-2PM, & BY APPOINTMENT IN TC 311
(EMAIL TO SCHEDULE 12+ HOURS AHEAD)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will explore how film has participated in the construction, deconstruction, and transformation of gender. Building on students' existing knowledge of early feminist film theory, which argued that Hollywood regularly constructs women as "Woman" through its myths, signs, and appeal to "the male gaze," we will study how cinema has solicited women's desires, even when not necessarily representing them on screen. And we will study the contributions of women, queer, trans, and BIPOC filmmakers and spectators to the critical interrogation and reimagining of gender through cinema. Across the semester, the relationship between text and context will be paramount to our studies. We will look to key films in feminist, queer, and trans film history and read interviews and autobiographical writings of feminist, queer, and trans directors and screen performers. More often than not, our focus will be the scholarship contextualizing and theorizing these films, including scholarship in queer and transgender studies.

After an initial unit on theories of gender, sexuality, and film spectatorship, we will spend a unit on the "bad object" of gay murder movies, reading scholarship by queer, trans, and Black film scholars on why it behooves us to sit with "bad" or "negative" images sometimes. Finally, we will conclude with a unit on trans documentaries, beginning with the iconic *Paris is Burning* and ending with last year's acclaimed *Framing Agnes*.

Students should leave the class with:

- Knowledge of how conceptions of gender changed over the second half of the 20th century; insight into the most pressing concerns regarding gender today; and clearer understanding of film's ongoing contributions to such matters

- Familiarity with the range of methodologies and approaches to study of gender and film developed within Screen Studies over the last fifty years
- The ability to analyze film—with regard to gender as it intersects with race, class, and sexuality—through such methodologies, both verbally and in writing

REQUIRED TEXTS

Paris Is Burning: A Queer Film Classic (Lucas Hilderbrand, 2013)
Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad (Hil Malatino, 2022)
The Talented Mr. Ripley (Patricia Highsmith, 1955)

(Both *Side Affects* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley* are available as audiobooks. Feel free to read in either format. Do be sure to take good notes if you listen, though.)

All other texts required for this course will be available as PDFs on Canvas.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING POLICIES

Participation: 10% of final grade
 Canvas Assignments: 15%
 Paper 1: 15%
 Paper 2: 20%
 Final Paper or Video Essay (Proposal, Presentation, Completed Project): 40%

Your final grade will be calculated as a score out of 100 possible points for the semester. A standard 90-80-70-60 scale will be applied.

“A” work extends and expands our in-class discussions and offers original and creative thought. It meets all elements of the assignment or exam prompt and responds with a high degree of organizational foresight. “A” is reserved for outstanding work.

“B” work responds to the assignment or exam prompt insightfully, revealing strong command of the material we have covered. “B” is reserved for good work. “B” work, however, is less bold, less original, and/or less organized and well written than “A” work.

“C” work completes assignments and meets assignment requirements, while demonstrating a partial understanding of course content and minimal original thinking.

“D” work meets the technical requirements enumerated in the assignment or exam prompt, while failing to demonstrate any significant course-specific learning.

“F” work fails to meet the requirements of the assignment or exam, including but not limited to: lack of concrete textual analysis, inability to answer prompts, insufficient length, excessive grammatical and/or spelling errors, or late submission.

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

Barring illness, emergency or development of covid-like symptoms, you are expected to attend every class meeting. Students who miss class will be ill prepared for assignments.

If you miss a class meeting, it is your responsibility to secure notes from a classmate and/or meet with the professor during office hours to learn about what you missed.

Students are expected to attend class having completed that day's reading and screening homework and taken careful notes on these materials. Students should come prepared to discuss the homework with their professor and peers.

Good class participation involves contributing to the discussion in an informed manner, being attentive to that conversation, and being respectful of the participants in it.

Students are asked to refrain from using laptops, phones or other devices for any other purpose than taking notes and accessing course materials, as activities like texting and messaging can be distracting for one's classmates and professor alike.

This course, like all other 1 unit courses at Clark, comes with the expectation that over the course of the semester students will devote 180 hours to its study. This means that in addition to the forty or so hours we will spend together in the classroom you should plan to devote another 140 hours to your readings, screenings, and assignments. Much of this time should go to reading each week. If you consistently put in this time, you ought to be prepared to serve as a productive class participant.

SUBMITTING WORK VIA EMAIL

Submit all assignments as attachments via email. When submitting work, be sure to include a header at the top of your assignment that includes your name. Also be sure to save all files as "LastName_Assignment," i.e. "Smith_Paper1" or "Smith_Paper2." Students who fail to do as much will be penalized a third of a letter grade.

WEEKLY CANVAS DISCUSSIONS

Each week you will have a short Canvas discussion post due. Half the class will submit Canvas posts about the readings ahead of class. The other half will share their notes from what we discussed in class afterwards. The goal is the creation of a collectively authored set of course notes, which students can return to when preparing papers.

When it is your week to post ahead of class, share roughly 500 words, answering the following questions for one of the week's required readings by Tuesday at 11:59pm:

1. Who wrote this book article or chapter? (Google and share what you find re: scholar's discipline, areas of interest, institutional affiliation, etc.)
2. What is this reading's thesis?
3. What methodology or methodologies does the author use?
4. What sort of intervention is the author making?
5. Who is the reading's audience (whether specifically delineated or implied)?
6. Summarize the progression of the author's argument, including two or three smaller, supporting arguments.
7. Define two key concepts (either the author's own or others' they cite).
8. What are the best examples or evidence provided for the author's argument(s)?

9. What passages would you be especially enthusiastic for the class to discuss? And, why?

Make clear in the title of your post what reading you are posting about. If a reading has received substantial posts by the time you go to post, please select a different reading. Provide page numbers, so your classmates can easily find the relevant passages.

When it is your week to post class notes, share roughly 300 words on your two primary takeaways from the week's content. Give credit to your professor and classmates as well as the scholars we are reading, attributing the ideas you are sharing to those appropriate. Again, include page numbers. Make these posts by Friday at noon.

Each week you will also need respond to one student in the other group than you, either by Wednesday at noon or Friday by 11:59pm, accordingly. These responses can be very casual and should be between 100 and 200 words in length.

Like participation more generally, you will not receive regular grades on these assignments. However, if you submit these assignments punctually and consistently put thought and care into them, you will receive an "A" for this portion of your grade come the end of the semester. If you are not punctual in submitting these assignments, forget to do them altogether, and/or regularly submit them with signs of little thought or care (including poor grammar and typos), you will receive a lower grade.

Group A: Last Names beginning with A through J

Group B: Last Names beginning with K through Z

Group A will post ahead of class Weeks 2, 4, 6, 8, & 10 and after class Weeks 3, 5, 7, & 11. Group B will do the inverse.

EXTRA CREDIT

Over the course of the semester, I may announce screenings, talks, and/or other events on campus or online related to the subject of our course. Attending each of these will earn you a half point of extra credit. Should you attend four such events, you will earn two points of extra credit, such that an 88 (B+) would become a 90 (A-).

PRE-READING

Students are expected to show up to class with a clear knowledge and understanding of Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" and bell hooks' responding 1992 essay "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators" (both are taught frequently in 100-level Screen and MCA courses). Please review these formative essays over the winter break if they are not fresh in your memory.

DISCLAIMER

As the professor, I reserve the right to make changes to any information contained in this syllabus at any time during the semester. Changes will be announced, and an updated version of the syllabus will be posted on Canvas and/or distributed to students.

Please also see the Screen Program's policies on course screenings and late work.

Course Schedule

UNIT I: THEORIES OF GENDER, SEXUALITY & SPECTATORSHIP

Jan. 19

Screen (ahead of the first day class/on your own):
Victor/Victoria (Blake Edwards, 1982)

Read: Patricia White, "Lesbian Cinephilia" from
Uninvited (1999); Chris Straayer, "Redressing the
'Natural': The Temporary Transvestite Film" from
Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies (1996); & Maria San
Filippo, "Binary Trouble and Compulsory
Monosexuality" from *The B Word* (2013)

Jan. 26

Screen: *Born in Flames* (Lizzie Borden, 1983)

Read: Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic" (1978); Teresa
de Lauretis, "Rethinking Women's Cinema: Aesthetics
and Feminist Theory" (1985); & Sara Ahmed, "Lesbian
Feminism" from *Living a Feminist Life* (2017)

Recommended Reading: Anne Friedberg, "An
Interview with Filmmaker Lizzie Borden" (1984)

Feb. 2

Screen: *The Matrix* (Lana & Lilly Wachowski, 1999)

Recommended Screening (on your own): *Boys Don't
Cry* (Kimberley Peirce, 1999) & trans vlogs

Read: Jack Halberstam, "The Transgender Look"
(2005); Cáel M. Keegan, "Mirror Scene: Transgender
Aesthetics in *The Matrix* and *Boys Don't Cry*" (2021); &
Hil Malatino, "Future Fatigue" from *Side Affects* (2022)

Recommended Reading: Cáel M. Keegan, "Sensing
Transgender" & "Interview with Lana Wachowski"
from *Lana and Lilly Wachowski* (2018)

Feb. 9

Screen: *Carol* (Todd Haynes, 2015)

Read: Patricia White, "Lesbian Reverie: *Carol* in History and Fantasy" (2022) & Mary Ann Doane, "Film & Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator" (1991)

Recommended Reading: Excerpts from *Patricia Highsmith: Her Diaries and Notebooks* (pgs. 7-16, 85-99, 412-37, 465-68, & 471-501)

Feb. 13

Paper #1 Due at 5pm via email

**UNIT II: BE GAY,
DO MURDER**

Feb. 16

Screen: *Rope* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1948) & *Swoon* (Tom Kalin, 1992)

Read: D.A. Miller, "Anal Rope" (1990) & Robin Wood, "The Murderous Gays: Hitchcock's Homophobia" (1995)

Recommended Reading: Farley Granger, *Include Me Out* (2007) excerpts & Tom Kalin, "Andy and Me (It's Not Real and It's Not Fiction)" (2022)

Feb. 23

Screen: *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991)

Read: Susan Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" (1994); Julia Serano, "Skirt Chasers: Why the Media Depicts the Trans Revolution in Lipstick and Heels" (2004); & Cáel M. Keegan, "In Praise of the Bad Transgender Object: *The Silence of the Lambs*" (2020)

2:50-3:50pm: Dr. Cáel M. Keegan Zoom guest lecture

Mar. 2 Screen: *Set It Off* (F. Gary Gray, 1996)
Read: Kara Keeling, "'What's Up with That? She Don't Talk?' *Set It Off*'s Black Lesbian Butch-Femme" from *The Witch's Flight* (2007) & Racquel J. Gates, "Negativity and the Black Popular Image" from *Double Negative* (2018)

Recommended Reading: Beretta E. Smith-Shomade, "'Rock-a-Bye, Baby!': Black Women Disrupting Gangs and Constructing Hip-Hop Gangsta Films" (2003)

Mar. 9 NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK

Mar. 16 Screen: *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (Anthony Minghella, 1999)

Recommended Screening: *Loving Highsmith* (Eva Vitija, 2022)

Read: Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955) & excerpts from *Patricia Highsmith: Her Diaries and Notebooks* (pgs. 159-83, 275-80, & 620-33)

Recommended Reading: Slavoj Žižek, "Not Desire to Have Him, but to be Like Him" (2003)

UNIT III: DOCUMENTING TRANSNESS

Mar. 23 Screen: *Paris Is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1990)

Read: Lucas Hilderbrand, *Paris Is Burning: A Queer Film Classic* (2013) & Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Subordination" (1993)

Mar. 27 **Paper #2 Due at 5pm via email**

Mar. 30

Screen: *Happy Birthday, Marsha* (Tourmaline & Sasha Wortzel, 2018) & *The Aggressives* (Eric Daniel Peddle, 2005)

Read: Kara Keeling, "Looking for M—: Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future" (2009) & Jennifer DeClue, "Carrying the Knowledge/Performing the Archive: An Afternoon with Marsha P. Johnson"" (2022)

Recommended Reading: Hil Malatino, "Introduction" from *Side Affects* (2022)

4:30pm: Dr. Jennifer DeClue guest lecture (in-person)

Apr. 6

Screen: *Framing Agnes* (Chase Joynt, 2022) & *Southern Comfort* (Kate Davis, 2001)

Read: Hil Malatino, "Fuck Feelings: On Numbness, Withdrawal, and Disorientation," "Found Wanting: On Envy" & "Beyond Burnout: On the Limits of Care and Cure" from *Side Affects* (2022)

Apr. 10

Final Proposal Due at 5pm via email

Apr. 13

NO CLASS THIS WEEK (PROF. SAMER AT SOCIETY FOR CINEMA & MEDIA STUDIES CONFERENCE); BEGIN WORKING ON FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

**UNIT IV:
WRAPPING UP**

Apr. 20

Final Presentations, Part I

Apr. 27

Final Presentations, Part II

May 8

Final Paper/Video Essay Due at 5pm via email

SCREENING CONTENT WARNING

Many of this course's screenings contain physical violence, sexual violence, hate speech and other derogatory and/or outdated terms. The documentaries at the end of the semester, for example, include accounts of actual trans murder and medical abuse, while the films in the previous unit take a variety of genre approaches to narrativizing fictional stories of queer(-coded) murderers. We will be studying *how* such subject matter is represented on screen as well as what meaning was made of these texts by audiences and scholars and such films' historical significance in both film history and histories of gender, sexuality, race, and class in the US. Studying these films does not mean endorsing the actions depicted, nor all filmmakers' creative decisions in their depictions. We are here to study cinema critically, not simply appreciate it.

Please speak to me at the start of the semester if you have any specific concerns. You are invited to share your concerns without needing to divulge the precise reasons why you have them. If you are enrolled at Clark, you are likely an adult, and you are encouraged to act with the agency you have as an adult to make tough decisions for yourself. I am circulating this syllabus far in advance of the start of the semester such that students have ample time to research the course content and decide if this is a class they are prepared to take at present. During the course of the semester, if any student finds themselves struggling with course content, they are encouraged to do what they deem best for themselves, including stepping out of a screening should they need to.

In my teaching experience as well as that of [colleagues in gender and sexuality studies and cinema and media studies](#), it has been nearly impossible for a professor to predict what will be triggering to individual students. You know yourself far better than I ever can. Many triggers (such as names, colors, sounds, etc.), in their very nature, cannot be predicted. Trigger warnings do not distinguish between oppositional or critical representations of traumatizing experience and sensationalistic or gratuitous representations. Overreliance upon trigger warnings can sometimes censor important representations of challenging histories and experiences authored by and for queer, transgender, women, and/or BIPOC subjects. For these reasons, it is my policy that each individual student take responsibility for their own mental health needs and proactively research and clearly communicate any concerns at the start of the semester.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

College can be stressful. This stress can be exasperated by crises. If you suspect you might be experiencing excessive anxiety, depression or some other mental health concern, please visit Clark's Office of Counseling and Personal Growth. They are located at 114 Woodland Street and open Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm (closed 12-1pm for lunch). Their phone number is (508) 793-7678. Their website also has a great list of resources: <https://www.clarku.edu/offices/counseling/mental-health-toolbox/>.

ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

If you require accommodations in this course due to a disability or a personal circumstance that will affect your learning in this course, please contact me, so we can discuss the best ways to meet your needs. Any student who needs accommodations for

disabilities should also register with the Office of Disability Services. For information, please contact accessibilityservices@clarku.edu or 508-798-4368.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is a basic value for all higher learning. Simply expressed, it requires that work presented must be wholly one's own and unique to that course. All direct quotations must be identified by source. Academic integrity can be violated in many ways: for example, by submitting someone else's paper as one's own; cheating on an exam; submitting one paper to more than one class; copying a computer program; altering data in an experiment; or quoting published material without proper citation of references or sources. Attempts to alter an official academic record will also be treated as violations of academic integrity.

To ensure academic integrity and safeguard students' rights, all suspected violations of academic integrity are reported to the College Board. Such reports must be carefully documented, and students accused of the infraction are notified of the charge. In the case of proven academic dishonesty, the student will receive a sanction, which may range from an F in the assignment or course to suspension or expulsion from the University.

The complete academic integrity policy is available with Academic Advising at <http://www.clarku.edu/offices/aac/integrity.cfm>

NOTICE: FACULTY MEMBERS ARE “RESPONSIBLE EMPLOYEES”

Clark University and its faculty are committed to creating a safe and open learning environment for all students. Clark University encourages all members of the community to seek support and report incidents of sexual harassment to the Title IX office (titleix@clarku.edu). If you or someone you know has experienced any sexual harassment, including sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, help and support is available.

Please be aware that all Clark University faculty and teaching assistants are considered responsible employees, which means that if you tell me about a situation involving the aforementioned offenses, I must share that information with the Title IX Coordinator, Brittany Rende (titleix@clarku.edu). Although I have to make that notification, you will, for the most part, control how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you wish to speak to a confidential resource who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can contact Clark's Center for Counseling and Professional Growth (508-793-7678), Clark's Health Center (508-793-7467), or confidential resource providers on campus: Prof. Stewart (als.confidential@clarku.edu), Prof. Palm Reed (kpr.confidential@clarku.edu), and Prof. Cordova (jvc.confidential@clarku.edu).