WGSS 187: GENDER, SEXUALITY, CULTURE | University of Massachusetts, Amherst | Fall 2023

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(they/them)
Email: baultman@umass.edu
Office Hours: Mon, 12:30-2:00pm
Office Location: South College, W405
Lectures: Every M/W, 11:15-12:05pm
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Some General Education Objectives:

- Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view.
- Evaluate evidence and rhetoric critically or analytically and produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions.
- Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring the U.S. experience in its diversity, including, but not limited to, anthropology, communications, cultural studies, economics, history, political science, psychology, public affairs, sociology, and U.S. literature.
- Analyze and discuss common institutions or patterns of life in contemporary U.S. society and how they influence, or are influenced by, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, belief, or other forms of social differentiation.

Course Description

The subject matter discussed in this class is as immersive as its theories are innovative. Our aim will be to locate and give shape to the founding intersections of social history, protest, and power. What we are called upon to do is nothing short of questioning many of our own founding principles of knowledge that props up our world, and shared worlds. Thus, we will be engaged with everyday practices of living a life that is deeply affected by many kinds of inequality that remain, sometimes maddeningly, obscured. To bring such matters to light we will both begin and end with similar questions. For example, what is power if it is more than the capacity to impose a will upon another? Living at the margins invites a pressing need to consider how identities are formed by, and intersect with each other. Can power be redescribed as a defining element of culture? We as humans, subjects to the very power we attempt to make our object, has recently offered many living with the U.S. to think what a politics of transformation means under strained conditions.

University of Massachusetts Land Acknowledgement

As an employee of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, I and the university must accept that its campus was founded and built on the unceded homelands of the Pocumtuc Nation on the land of the Norrwtutck community. We recognize these lands and waters as important Relations with which we are all interconnected and depend on to sustain life and wellbeing. The Pocumtuc had connections with these lands for millennia. Over 400 years of colonization, when Pocumtuc Peoples were displaced, many joined their Algonquian relatives to the east, south, west and north. That includes Mashpee and Aquinnah Wampanoag, Nipmuc, Narragansett, Mohegan, Pequot, Mohican, communities and Abenaki and other nations of the Wabanaki Confederacy. These Native peoples still maintain connections and relationships of care for these lands today. We also acknowledge that the University of Massachusetts Amherst is a Land Grant University. As part of the Morrill Land Grant Act, portions of land from 82 Native Nations west of the Mississippi were sold to provide the resources to found and build this university. As an active first step toward decolonization, I encourage each student to learn more about the Native Nations whose homelands UMass Amherst now resides on and the Indigenous homelands on which you live and work. We also invite you to deepen your relationship to these living lands and waters.

Course Approach, Logistics, Policies

Course approach: Recognizing that learning is not an individual endeavor, WGSS187 has always been a feminist experiment in building and sustaining intellectual and political communities. (I would like to thank Professor Kiran Asher for this addition to the syllabus.)
**Moodle:** Once you register for the course, you will automatically be added to the course’s Moodle page (https://umass.moonami.com/) and the class email list (wgss-187-01-fal22@groups.umass.edu). Moodle is your first port of entry for instructions, updates, readings, study questions, quizzes, etc. Use your IT username and password to sign into the course Moodle and access course information. Make sure that your university email (yourname@umass.edu) works, and check Moodle regularly. Contact IT (it@umass.edu) if you have any problems.

**Office Hours:** Although the office hours are listed here and updated on Moodle, I do encourage you to stop by with questions about class material, brainstorm research ideas, talk about topics that sparked your intellectual curiosity, or discuss your performance in class. We are committed to ensuring student needs are met—but, as fellow human beings, we understand that life has a way of intervening on our commitments. Although office hours should be used less for asking questions like, “What did I miss?” from an absence, we are very welcome to follow up with specific queries/concerns about course content and how to accommodate academic life with everyday life.

**Academic Honesty Statement:** Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at UMass. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent (http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/)

**Course Accessibility and Accommodation Statement:** UMass, Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. The course takes the UDL principles seriously and the class material will be available in multiple formats via Moodle for all students. Details about the course modality are in the pages that follow. In addition, Disability Services (DS) provides services to students with disabilities: http://www.umass.edu/disability/ and keeps documentation on file of physical, psychological, or learning disability. If you need accommodations contact DS and us within the first two weeks of the term so that we can work together to meet your learning needs. A letter from DS is not sufficient excuse for late or missed work or absences. If, after consulting the syllabus, you anticipate missing classes or think you will
need alternative formats and timelines for assignments, please contact us well before the assignment deadline to make arrangements. If you need to record class lectures as part of ADA accommodations please be advised that this course utilizes “Echo 360” for audio-visual recordings. Recordings and note sharing for ADA accommodations are for your use only and may not be distributed or sold.

**Required Texts:** All reading materials are available as PDFs via Moodle.

**Assignments and Grade Distributions**

**Attendance (5%):** Attendance and preparedness are expected. The course is designed around both lecture and in-class discussion. Students should have completed the reading assignment a given week before the class session that Friday.

**Weekly Journals (25%):** Students are expected to write weekly (250-300 word minimum) journal entries that explore questions such as:

- What was the key theme of the week’s reading?
- What were the main takeaways of the text and/or in-class discussion?
- Did this reading provide a different perspective on the issue?

**Monthly Quizzes (25%):** Each quiz will cover only the content for its preceding month, e.g., quizzes are not cumulative. These should be completed by their deadlines via the appropriate modules on Moodle. There will be a week between a quiz becoming visible and closing.

**Final Exam / Final Media Review Project (45%):** There will be two options for a “final.” Students may take a traditional exam. Access to the final will be similar to the method of accessing monthly quizzes. Students will complete the written exam (essay-based and short answer) online in a time-monitored format. Students will have the option of saving their exam and returning to it at a later point. Alternatively, students may choose to write a media review. The expectations and rubric for this option are located at the end of the syllabus.

**Grade Distribution:** 97-99 A+ | 93-96 A | 90-92 A- | 87-89 B+ | 83-86 B | 80-82 B- | 77-79 C+ | 73-77 C | 70-72 C- | 67-69 D+ | 63-66 D | 60-62 D- | 0-59 F
Part of unlearning inherited knowledge is de-familiarizing what we know about the object that inhabit our world.

“It is only by being shameless about risking the obvious that we happen into the vicinity of the transformative.” Eve Sedgwick

Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Major Themes/Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wed, Sept 6</td>
<td>Syllabus &amp; Lecture: General Overview of Women’s and Gender Studies.</td>
<td>Course Expectations, Graded Assignments, Important Deadlines, Resources, Keywords.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri, Sept 8: Discussion Section</td>
<td>Butler, Judith: “Against Proper Objects.”</td>
<td>Possible Discussion Question: What brought you to this course?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed, Sept 13</td>
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<td>Power and Sexuality, The Body, Discourse, History, Sex, Political Power</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri, Sept 15: Discussion Section</td>
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<td>Possible Discussion Question: How is the power over life and death distributed in unequal ways according to social class?</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri, Sept 22</td>
<td>Possible Discussion Question: If one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman, then can our contemporary use of a binary distinction between cis/trans still have critical currency?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed, Sept 27</td>
<td>Various Authors, The Combahee River Collective Statement</td>
<td>Politics and Solidarity Movements, Coalition, Oppression</td>
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<td>Fri, Sept 29</td>
<td>Possible Discussion Question: What about identity makes the formation of a coalition for social change more difficult, or less so?</td>
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<td>Fri, Oct 6</td>
<td>Possible Discussion Question: What about intersectionality involves “lived experience,” or the study of actually existing practices and narratives?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon, Oct 9</td>
<td>Indigenous Peoples Day</td>
<td>Histories of Race and Racism, Media and Representation, Ordinary Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tue, Oct 10</td>
<td>Hartman, Saidiya: “A Note on Method,” and “The Terrible Beauty of the Slum”</td>
<td>Histories of Race and Racism, Media and Representation, Ordinary Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed, Oct 11</td>
<td>Anzaldúa, Gloria: “To Live in the Borderlands Means You...” from <em>Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza</em></td>
<td>Poetry and Theory, Living Differences/Living Differently, Latin@/Chican@/Queer Feminism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri, Oct 13: Discussion Section</td>
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<td><strong>Possible Discussion Question:</strong> What’s your favorite scary movie, or, How does the media perpetuate the inequalities that intersect women’s lives? What media (as in a kind of medium such as poetry, prose, or audiovisual) can be transformative?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon, Oct 16</td>
<td>Lugones, María. “Playfulness, World-Traveling, and Loving Perception”</td>
<td>Feminist Reckonings with Feminisms, Queer Sexualities, Love as Infra-Political Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri, Oct 20</td>
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<td><strong>Possible Discussion Question:</strong> What are some of the practical elements of a reproductive justice paradigm?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon, Oct 23</td>
<td>Hardt, Michal: “Affective Labor”</td>
<td>Theories of Social Reproduction, Reproductive and Emotional Labor, Laboring Bodies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed, Oct 25</td>
<td>Tallbear, Kim: “Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family,” from <em>Making Kin Not Population</em> and Excerpts from “Dissenting Opinion” in U.S. Supreme Court Case <em>Dobbs v. Jackson</em> (2022)</td>
<td><strong>Possible Discussion Question:</strong> What does the concept of “family” share with more general concepts like “populations”? Is the Supreme Court’s dissent in <em>Dobbs</em> an indication that these</td>
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<td>Fri, Oct 27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon, Oct 30: No Class</td>
<td>Please review glossary terms. Take the day for mental health and personal care.</td>
<td>distinctions matter to law-makers?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed, Nov 1</td>
<td>Enke, Finn: “The Education of Little Cis: Cisgender and the Disciplining of Opposing Bodies”</td>
<td>Trans Studies, Differences of Gender and Gender Identity, Discipline and Regulatory Practices of Embodiment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri, Nov 3</td>
<td>Possible Discussion Question: Returning to Simone de Beauvoir, does the term “cis” solidify its own naturalness by suggesting that, indeed, one can be born a man or woman?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon, Nov 6</td>
<td>Bey, Marquis: “ALP Journals,” from Them Goon Rules: Fugitive Essays on Radical Black Feminism</td>
<td>Transfeminism, Blackness and Transness, Abolitionist Feminism, Intimate Protest, Coalitions</td>
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<td>Wed, Nov 8</td>
<td>Awkward-Rich, Cameron: “Trans, Feminism: Or, How to Read Like a Depressed Transsexual”</td>
<td>Feminist Tensions and Transmasculinity, Poetry and Literature as Theoretical Tools, Living Theory/Writing Theory</td>
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<td>Fri, Nov 9</td>
<td>Possible Discussion Question: What are the connections between disability studies and trans feminism that Awkward-Rich proposes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon, Nov 13</td>
<td>Golden, Selection of Prose-Poetry from <em>And Everything In Between: Black Non0Binary People in Our Own Words</em></td>
<td>Trauma, Representation, Psychoanalysis, Race and Gender, Phenomenology, Poetics of Sexuality</td>
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<td>Fri, Nov 17</td>
<td><strong>Possible Discussion Question:</strong> Explain whether you think Chu’s presentation of her own desire for gender-affirming care was an effective way to describe how even transness is a matter of ordinary forms of belonging?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon, Nov 20 – Fri, Nov 24: No Class</td>
<td><em>We have scheduled no classes for this week.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon, Nov 27</td>
<td>Lugones, María: “Toward a Decolonial Feminism”</td>
<td>Theories of Change, Justice as Transformative, Breaking (With/From) Colonial Structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed, Nov 29</td>
<td>Berlant, Lauren: “’68, or Something”</td>
<td>Theories of Change, Historical Time, Feeling and Thinking Historically</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri, Dec 1</td>
<td><strong>Possible Discussion Question:</strong> If thinking about change and transformation requires rethinking the present, how do we move beyond what contains us within history?</td>
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<td>Mon, Dec 4</td>
<td>Open Meeting: Discussing the Contemporary Moment</td>
<td>Historically Speaking...</td>
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<td>Review for Final Exam. Class Evaluations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed, Dec 6</td>
<td><strong>Discussion Section:</strong> Review Final Exam.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri, Dec 8: Last Discussion Section Meeting</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<td>Major Themes/Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon, Dec 11</td>
<td>Final Exam or Final Media Project should be turned in via Moodle Module.</td>
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**Additional Resources**

*Embodyment, The Body, Structures of Life*


*Queer/Trans Feminisms*


Glossary of Frequently Used Terms

**Affect**: The state or condition of being affected. Usually indicates sensation before emotional intelligibility.

**Alienation**: Refers to a psychic condition first advanced by Karl Marx in his *1844 Manuscripts* whereby human beings are stripped of their otherwise natural relationship with either: (1) the biological and metabolic conditions assigned to labor (*see* Embodiment); or (2) the products thereof.

**Binary Logic**: The ordering of reality (or ontology) into two essentially diametrically opposite groups. The binary itself is often loosely held together by historical consolidation and social taboo. The first term is often understood to be the “normative” term that conditions the second, or subordinate, term. The most notable binaries discussed in this class include:

- **Male/Female**: Refers to the (biological) sexual differentiation of the human body usually assigned at birth and is dependent upon the intelligible presence of genitalia. Males typically have the visible signs of reproductive organs such as the penis, testes, and scrotum. Females typically have the visible signs of reproductive organs associated with the vulva: the clitoris, labia, and vaginal canal.

- **Man/Woman**: Refers to the social functions assigned to the sexual differentiations accorded to a person birth-assigned sex. Social functions tend to follow a logic according primacy of the phallus: assertive/passive; penetrative/receptive; dominant/subservient; subject/object.

- **Marked/Unmarked**: Refers to the conditional states associated with privileged or unprivileged status. The marked category is understood within a cultural imaginary as difference, is always seen or implied, and carries stigma. The unmarked category is understood as the very reproduction of the cultural imaginary itself. Hence man/woman follows the logic of marked/unmarked, so too does Black/white.

- **Masculinity/Femininity**: Refers to the various expressions of gender’s social functionality that follow a similar logic assigned to the man/woman binary. Masculine traits are usually ascribed to male bodies and used to identify normative manly behaviors such as activity, productivity, and aggressivity. Feminine traits are usually ascribed to female bodies and are used to identify normative womanly behaviors such as passivity, reproductive, and caregiving.

- **Public/Private**: Refers to the general difference accorded to everyday life associated with Aristotle’s *Politics* that accord public life a primacy of relations (political in nature) assumed by property holders. The private is the domain of individual property holders whose ownership extended, for Aristotle, over the entirety of the domain. As property holders were limited to men this relation of dominance subsumed wives, children, concubines, and slaves.

- **Sameness/Difference**: Refers to the philosophical relations of identity associated with John Locke and the European Enlightenment. Sameness is the basis for the consolidation of the self-identity of a subject, a human being accorded with rational faculties and civility. Difference is the basis for constructing the other or non-identity of an object, a (sometimes) human being denied rational faculties and civility. It should be noted that sameness as well as identity are founded on the presence of its binary opposite, difference.

- **Subject/Object**: Refers to the European Enlightenment’s elaboration of the status of an agent or self-sufficient being (subject) and its passive non-agentic being (object) upon which the former exercises control over the latter. Subjects tend to reflect the privileges accorded to their relation within a cultural system or symbolic economy that has consolidated subjectivity (manhood or selfhood) and objectivity (womanhood or otherness). *See* Subjectivity or Object Relations.
**Blackness**: The ante-ontological movement of a (what is before the bodies, flesh, or pigmentation) cultural whole associated Black American lifeworlds. Associated with the Radical Black Tradition and the works of Fred Moten, Cedric Robinson, and Hortense Spillers.

**Body, the**: The ontological (what is assigned real or existent) entity consisting of a whole organism with visible enclosures of flesh, internal structures that may include skeleton and muscle.

**Chattel Slavery**: Refers to the institutional designs of human servitude lasting between the 16th and 19th centuries as a global and, more particularly, an American economy. Characterized by the total abjection and objectification of the human-in-servitude (hence chattel) and the total loss of legal and social standing as a human being.

**Cis, see Trans**: Refers to a normativity that defines the so-called coherence between a subject’s gender and their birth-assigned sex. Recent criticisms have shown that cis (gender, sexual) tends to naturalize this “coherence” and normalize transness as pathologically “incoherent.”

**Color Line, the**: Refers to W. E. B. DuBois’s term first elaborated in *The Souls of Black Folks* wherein he named racial difference a matter of socially constructed and historically consolidated value placed on the color of the flesh. Usually denotes a racial difference in binary distinction between Black and white.

**Commodity Fetish**: Refers to the theory first advanced by Karl Marx most famously in the first volume of *Das Kapital* holding that capitalism and its free markets alienate human labor from the products of that labor (commodity) to such an extent that the commodity’s meaningfulness outstrips its actual worth.

**Community**: Community is a singular-plural noun referring to a group of individual members possessing a similar psychic, historical, or affective bond. May also refer to an “imaginal bond” such as the nation.

**Communities, of Color**: Refers to the multiple and sometimes overlapping groups consisting of a singular community-plural characterized by non-whiteness (see Racialization). Criticized for its lumping together of otherwise disparate communities, such as Black American communities, whose histories and contemporary social relations are radically divergent.

**Disability**: A term coined in during the late-20th century activists to describe the conditional (long-term or short-term, chronic or episodic) incapacity to interact with so-called normalized standards of society/culture. The terms is often criticized for its reduction of a person to a single or series of difference of embodiments that mark them redundantly as not able-bodied. A more capacious definition refers the ways that normative accounts of the so-called able body (bipedally mobile, heterosexually reproductive, economically productive) have become coherent thereby rendering the constructed world's normativity invisible. Visible and non-visible disabilities are typically included with the latter having only recently been added.

**Discourse**: The term typically refers to the exchange of communication between two or more people. Its importance to critical theory changed when Michel Foucault contended that discourse consists of a domain of knowledge affirming or disaffirming conditional statements consolidated into a field or branch of science. Importantly, the term links the production of both nature and culture, holding that nature is as much a product of domains of knowability within the frameworks historically defined within culture.

**Discursive**: The adjectival form of discourse. Refers to the way that an object or subject is formed under the conditions particular to a discourse (e.g., biology historically produced racial differences that have been largely criticized as discursive and, therefore, not part of any natural order).

**Embodiment, see Body**: The condition or phenomenological sensation assigned to having or living within a body.
**Enfleshment**: A term associated with Hortense Spillers in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” referring to the way that the body is first visualized and understood through the interface of the flesh; it is, in her argument, the first body with which slavers and colonists came in contact.

**Essentialism**: The philosophical or moral belief associated with medieval Christian humanists like St. Augustine who argued that God created a fixed core that is universal and prior to any constituent part of a larger whole. Essentialism holds that an essence of a thing is the eternal cause of actions, behaviors, and the production or destruction of lifeworlds. It is summed up by the Latin motto *essentia prior ad actio*.

**Existentialism**: The philosophy or moral belief most associated with Jean-Paul Sartre who argued that human life is an ongoing product (an accumulation of action and agency) that cannot be ascribed to an essential feature. Human life is therefore open to radical free will which is only constrained by social conditions (such as class, race, gender, ableism). Often associated with later “anti-humanist” schools of thought arguing that the term “human” is corrupted by its history with humanism. It is summed up by the Latin motto *actio prior ad essentia*.

**Feminism**: A heterogenous (or pluralized) collection of philosophical and social beliefs, programs, and (sometimes) political identities. Feminist theory holds that most Western models of democracy (indeed its very history) is based on a male-sex dominated social arrangement privileging the status of men as a social group. Criticism of this arrangement, or patriarchy, has been recently revised to include heteronormative reproduction, cisnormative (or nontrans) ableism, and racial exclusivity. Criticisms internal to the most recent iterations of feminism include the cisnormativity and racially exclusivity of feminism itself, including its Euro-American (or Western) centrum.

**Fugitivity**: A term associated with decolonial thinker Edouard Glissant that has been recently been taken up within Black Studies and Critical Race Theory. Glissant refers to fugitivity as meaningfulness particular to a historical or cultural community or set of communities which remains outside the capacity of Western thought to conceptualize. See Blackness and its ante-ontological status.

**Gender**: One part of an often tripartite description of the reproductive body (sex/gender/gender identity) that refers to the social function associated with a person’s birth-assigned sex. See Sex, Gender Identity.

**Gender Identity**: On part of an often tripartite description of the reproductive body (sex/gender/gender identity) that refers to the internal relation between (or identity of) a person’s gender and their birth-assigned sex. See Gender, Sex.

**Historical Materialism**: A philosophical model associated with the collected works of Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels in their co-authored *Communist Manifesto*. This model elaborates the development and subsequent identity of a given social, political, and economic totality through a rigorous focus on the productive means and modes particular to moments within an historically conditioned time. Materialism is the underlying theoretical component positing the indispensable need to understand the actually existing modes of everyday life through focus on technologies, media, and human sensoria.

**Intersectionality**: A mode of analysis coined in the early 1990s by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Crenshaw developed the approach to illustrate and address how socio-economic inequalities affect Black women at disproportionately higher rates and under the specific circumstances these rates emerge. Crenshaw has described the origination of intersectionality as a prism through which feminism and other kinds of social justice advocacy can identify the situated antagonisms that race and gender coincide and condition life chances. It is part of the anti-racism labor that feminist approaches to social justice must incorporate.

**Intersex**: Refers to the often medicalized histories and narratives that mark “ambiguities” in newborn infants’ genitalia as pathological in condition and, often, argued to require medical intervention. These medicalized standards have been heavily criticized through decades of activism. Intersex is often discussed as a birth-
attributable condition; but, as many have with the Intersex Society of North America have pointed out, intersex traits may not emerge until well after infancy.

**Nonbinary, or Genderqueer:** A social kind formed out of a relation of non-identity between a person’s birth-assigned sex and socially elaborated genders. Nonbinary communities may identify between the binary poles of man/woman or entirely outside, invoking a different set of cultural and historical markers that are claimed over and beyond Western notions of gender.

**Normativity:** Refers to the interlocking set of social and historical imaginaries setting the framework for what constitutes regular, ordinary, or “normal” kinds or genres of being, behavior, and action.

**Object Relations, see Subjectivity:** Refers to the imaginary (but not fictional) relationships formed out of the integration of normative subjects and subjectivities within a larger cultural totality.

**Ontological, or Ontology:** Refers to a theory or conventional belief underwriting what constitutes reality and real objects. Often referred to by the philosophical branch of Metaphysics.

**Phenomenology:** Refers to the philosophical study of experience as a process through which the experience and phenomena are registered as experience. This philosophy breaks with existentialism’s emphasis on the primacy of human consciousness. Phenomenology emphasizes a de-centered or non-centrality of consciousness as such and opens the field of thought to the importance of affect and the unconscious. The motto most often associated with phenomenology is “to the things themselves.”

**Power, or Relations:** Typically refers to the capacity of one subject to exercise their will over another. Usually one agent can possess power and another cannot. This concept is attributed to the sociological vernacular of Max Weber. More recent scholarship has tended to adopt Michel Foucault’s concept of power as being dispersed, non-possessable, and a product of a series of interlocking relations that produce different forms of coercion in the guise of non-oppressive “knowledge.” Thus, power and knowledge become mutual expressions of one another when knowledge about the body enables prison wardens more exacting disciplinary measures to restrict movement and bodily mobility for punishment.

**Productive Labor:** Attributed to the work and industry of a person or class of persons whose metabolic energies (or labor) produce economically viable (or profitably) goods/commodities.

**Property Relations:** Refers to the kinds of relationships that emerge as a result of legal and social restrictions on who and how property (defined loosely as both land and material object) is distributed within civil society.

**Race/Racialization, see Color Line:** Refers to the socially assignation of value placed upon the human condition based on physiological differences. These racial divisions, or analytic as Denise Ferreira da Silva names it, took place over the course of centuries (racialization) and consolidated what is contemporarily the “vision” as color difference as racial difference. No scientific evidence exists that hasn’t been summarily discarded proving the existence of biologically significant differences for “race” as a human distinction. Its continued influence over contemporary politics and social sciences (and some natural sciences) reproduces the power-as-knowledge relation. See Power.

**Reproductive Labor:** Attributed to the work and industry of those social subjects usually restricted to the private domain and excluded from the productive labor of market economies. These include, historically, women (wives) and domestic workers (hired outside the protections of the state), or slaves and indentured servants (the former lacking the conditional status of “human” granted to the latter). Each participated under relations that favored men (husbands) as workers. Wives, domestic workers, daughters, or other-mothers were responsible for the reproduction of and well-being of children and therefore the growth of the economy’s labor force; the
reproduction of everyday tasks that allowed men to enter the labor force; or the upkeep of the household so as to reduce the stress that enabled the daily operations of otherwise laboring men.

**Sex, or Sexual Difference:** Refers to the primary reproductive characteristics assigned to a newborn infant on the basis of male or female genitalia. Sex has become the site of ongoing criticism as the standards for what constitutes adult sex in a meaningful or universal way has been adopted. For example, some U.S. states regard sex as genital-based while others refer to the chromosomal differences at the genetic level. Each elaboration of sex merely reaffirms the social functionality of a gender to which the latter is eventually assigned.

**Sexuality:** Refers to the erotic desires of a social subject that has too often been reduced to a heteronormative trope of sex-opposite attraction often presupposing a monogamous intention. Reproductive heterosexuality is generally used to ascribe what is socially understood as the “drive” or “instinct” to procreate. This has had direct effects on non-heterosexual sexualities that include dismissing same-gender eroticism (homophobia) to the legitimation of only the two-person monogamous couple (homonormative).

**Social Construction:** Refers to the theory that reality and its objects are constituted as “real” by and through the interdependencies of shared knowledge among peoples across history, culture, and material production. Social constructionists hold that everything is constructed to the extent that knowledge about a thing (as in everything) requires moving through the processes of historical and cultural meaning.

**Social Reproduction, see Reproductive Labor:** Refers to the labor required to keep the infrastructure of a civil society and its constituent parts (social subjects) alive and productive.

**Subjectivity, see Subject/Object under Binary Logic:** Refers to the capacity of a person to possess an interior psychic life in and through which feeling is expressed, explored, and enjoyed.

**Trans, see Cis:** Refers to the umbrella term that describes a variety of subjectivities. Some experience their normatively ascribed gender and birth-assigned sex at odds. Others describe their them in completely different vernaculars. Recent criticism among trans theorists hold that there is rarely “match” between any gender and sex and therefore push back against the “normalizing” form of dysphoria.

**Whiteness:** Refers to a cultural ontology that ascribes privilege to light-skin and otherwise visually “Euro-American” white social subjects. Whiteness does not depend on white populations or individual white people. It refers to the discursive and material system of rewards and punishments that includes an anti-Black racism (and classism) immanent to it which diminishes the life chances of Black and non-white people while enhancing those of ascribed as white.
Assignment Answers Worth Full Credit

The following examples were taken from recent semesters and demonstrate top marks for each assignment. First, are journal entries and demonstrate (1) a review of the material; (2) a regularity of reference to the material; (3) critical themes of import for the student. The second is a quiz answer that did an exceptionally good job of elaborating a theme for which the question asked. The journal entry was edited with permission by the student (indicated by the bracketed ellipses.

Journal Entries [Simone de Beauvoir and becoming “woman”]: This idea that one isn’t born a woman yet becomes one rings true to me and my own understanding of gender in itself personally I believe that gender isn’t a real thing but rather a social construct that is taught and we learn through being socialized. Femininity is not inherent but rather constructed. De Beauvoir states in the second sex that women have been treated as inferior and as “secondary” due to the fact of society programming women to fulfill the needs of men and exist only in relation to men thus not being whole or developed but rather existing to please or serve, constantly seek validation from men inherently teaching women that their worth is connected to the way men perceive them enforcing the beliefs that being “pretty” or “desirable” is the utmost achievement of a woman, and, the historic imbalance of rights and political power or public influence. [...] De Beauvoir argues that a woman is taught from childhood to merely be an accessory rather than a full fledge person.

Quiz Answer [Hortense Spillers, the “flesh,” and motherhood denied]: The meaning of assigning a “female” form to the social position of “gender” is another nod to Black women being marked and thereby gatekept from a lot of traditional “womanly” things reserved only for white women. The theft of the body becomes a displacement from social identities and the undoing of the Black female gender as a symbolically dense power. It is not the same as her white counterpart because it is complicated and subverted by her race. The body is stolen or disposed of. Spillers argues that the Black female gender, that of female subjectivity, because it is written out of cultural power, gives the woman-subject a unique position to name herself, to be insurgent.
End of Semester Assignment Option 1: Final Exam

General Instructions You must provide answers as indicated for each part. Please read the instructions carefully. You may choose to answer any 3 of the 5 “short answer” questions in PART ONE, but you must additionally answer 2 of the 4 “essay answers” from PART TWO.

1. **Short Answers (30 pts):** Answer ONLY three in any order. You should answer any three as distinct questions. A 200-250 word paragraph for each answer should suffice. Please double space your answers in 12 pt. font. Reference the reading material if given the chance/prompt.

2. **Essay Answers (70 pts):** Answer two, and no more than two, from the following. Please provide your answers in essay format, i.e., 500 -750 words, double-spaced, and in 12 pt. font. These answers are not unlike your quiz responses. Again, each question should be treated separately. You should have two distinct answers that address their respective questions. For these answers, reference the reading material when and where you can. Each question is stand alone. They SHOULD NOT relate to one another.
End of Semester Assignment Option 2: Media Review

Overview

1. **Paper Components:** Select an aesthetic representation from popular media. This can include, for instance, a popular TV show, streaming content, blog, or vlog, or even a book/graphic novel. Some shows discussed in class have been *Pose* and *Rupaul’s Drag Race* while movies have included *Moonlight* and documentary films such as *Paris is Burning*. Other shows and movies include *Pose*, *Beautiful*, *Tangerine*, *Steven Universe*—to name a few.

2. **Objective:** The critical object is this. Tie that aesthetic representation to a theme from the course. This can (and should) include an author/thinker (e.g., Patricia Williams) within larger thematic content (e.g., racist sexism). This essay is a critical review of the show, or artwork, or book, or book chapter, etc., and its relation a theme you found interesting during the course. This is your chance to write something you find personally compelling and of interest, using thinkers from the syllabus to advance your claim.

3. **Citational Format:** Complete your review in 1,500 words, double spaced, in 12-pt. font. Any citation style is acceptable. I will accept MLA, APA, Chicago/Turabian—any style. Please consult the following rubric for any format-related concerns/organizational inquiries. A reference page is required.

Rubric and Standard Grading Distribution

Papers should adopt these sections and numbering schemes as a means of organizing their work.

Part I—The Aesthetic Object/The Work/The Piece (30 pts.):

1. **Subject Matter:** Who or What is Represented?

2. **Artist/Author/Thinker:** What person or group made it? Often this is not known. If there is a name, refer to this person as the artist, writer, painter, and/or author, depending on the medium. Refer to this person by their last name, not familiarly by their first name.

3. **Date:** When was it made? Is it a copy of something older? Was it made before or after other similar works?

4. **Provenance and Location:** Where was it made? For whom (was there an intended audience)? Is it typical of the art of a geographical area? Where is the work of art now? Where was it originally located? Who has access to it? Is it public, behind a paywall, or owned by a museum/archive?

5. **Technique and Medium:** What material is it made of (if painting, what kind; if animated, indicate that it is animation)?

Part II—Description of Substance (30 pts.):

6. **Description:** In a few sentences describe the work. What does it look like or how was its presentation executed (if a show, for example, were there emphases on flow and time or montage and discontinuity)?
7. **Story-Telling Method:** Is it a representation of something? Provide, in your own words, what is being shown or told. Usually you can identify whether it is an abstraction of a real-world event, a people, or community, a narrative history, or contemporary situation? What aspects are emphasized through “the story” that the piece is telling. (Remember than a single episode of just one show can tell a whole story!)

8. **Subjective vs. Objective Mode:** Is it purely subjective work that is basing itself on a writer’s/director’s point of view (a TV show is very much along these lines)? Or is it an objective work that seeks to cast new light on a subject matter (documentaries generally provide this kind of direction)? Tell me what elements are dominant in the piece.

Part III—Analysis/Discussion (20 pts.) and Conclusion (10 pts.):

9. **Analysis:** In your own words, consider how the artist/writer/thinker utilized their craft to tell their story. What principles of women’s and gender studies did they use? What theories were key to your understanding any “underlying” or “represented” meaning? Was there additional meaning apart from that provided by the work that possessed meaning?

10. **Discussion:** Provide support for what you are arguing. Refer to specific moments of the show, documentary, animation, or parts of the painting, performance, or theatrical rendition. Your discussion should contain facts about the work, yes. But it should also contain references to why these “facts” might mean something else. (For example, it is an observable fact that the subject of the *Mona Lisa* is half-smiling. But what does this mean, historically? Some speculate that she represents the opacity, or unknowability, of femininity—unknowable to Da Vinci and, for the time, any man whose gaze befalls the portrait.)

11. **Conclusion:** End with a few sentences restating what major theme, or themes, you hoped to convey in the essay. Clarify the intended interpretation. Did you, in fact, execute what you said you did?
I. The Medium/Aesthetic Work: Poetics of Remembering

*X-Men: The Animated Series (TAS)* was the brainchild of Larry Houston, Julia Lewald, and Eric Lewald. Co-creator Larry Houston told a reporter, “there were no computers then. I brought in my collection of X-Men comic books to work. And when I went to hand out stories to the artists, I’d put them on the Xerox machine [and] copy the pages I thought were pertinent” (Belt 2020). TAS was a collaborative construction of a universe based on the interpretation of another, well-designed and intricate one. And all were, in the end, based on the interpretations of our world—the world of a nine-year-old fan of Marvel Comics, like me, when the series aired in 1992. […]

II. Description of Substance: Figures of Otherness

[…] TAS poses complex questions of race, gender, ability, and class inequalities. And they are not merely projected onto the cartoon. As director and writer Eric Lewald states in an interview, the desire for a diverse team of actors in TAS had to be advanced with some force. Indeed, “it was dumb luck that [the animated team] was gender-balanced” Belt, “The Making of X-Men: The Animated Series.”. The creators’ stories are inscribed into their craft as so many representations of, and reactions to, the world. The genre of heroic storytelling compelled the team to produce the series during a time that, as I have mentioned, felt distinctively lacking in heroes. Social differences such as gender, sex, sexuality, race, and ability—not to mention economic class—find a representational home in a term Ramzi Fawaz calls “mutanity” *The New Mutants*, 159.. On my view, however, mutanity is able to represent pure difference. Mutants (humans whose genetic mutations have granted them extraordinary powers) still possess certain racial and gendered attributes that shape their appearances and bear tropological behaviors—racialized ascriptions of masculinity and femininity. This decision is one that opens a space of identification between viewer and animated characters. My point is that mutants are, in themselves, embodiments of difference as difference. They are considered different by virtue of their mutanity. Certain embodied differences are symbolically eclipsed even while they remain visible. Consider Ororo Munroe (or Storm). She is a mutant. But she is also a Black-African woman. She is an immigrant in the American milieu. She grew up in Cairo. She was exploited as a pickpocket in her youth. She would be worshipped as a goddess of her tribe. Yet she is bound to the narrative voice of mutanity’s pure difference. Her mutanity is the non-being of normative humanity. How does Magneto (like revolutionaries who fought to overcome bigotry) reconcile his own beliefs with those of his comrades and closest friend? […]

III. Analysis and Discussion: Magneto, Fantasy, and Queer Love

[…] Is Magneto bad at being bad? Exploring this requires looking into scenes of attachment that comprise his affective order to things. Teasing out scenes of attachment can clarify his fantasy-world that compel and, ironically, repel him. Attachments comprise the basis for believing life has some regularity to it. Desires get satisfied. The world turns. All attachments are optimistic in this way (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 1). Every scene of attachment generates a force that pushes and pulls the subject (human/mutant) in ordinary life. This tends to be more than an individual achievement. Desires are not independent of the cultural fields that give them meaning. Magneto’s attachments emerge from a history of loss. The world becomes less complicated when humanity, overall, conspires against his utopian desire. The structural component that glues affect and attachment in this psychic dramatization is called fantasy. The fantasy allows Magneto to entertain all kinds of
scenarios. Even the repetition of those scenes wherein he must inevitably lose. Fantasy de-dramatizes failure. More importantly, he fails to realize that his structural fantasy is an inversion of a human ideology: recognition.

[...]

How might that alter our perception of justice and the projected outcome of Magneto’s projects? Obsessively re-watching TAS for research and evidence used in this chapter meant attending to repeated gestures and choice phrases. It also meant attuning as much as possible to differences between what was said and what felt to be unsayable. Animation (like all media) represents in some way the very real world of its creators. They construct for us objects of interest and experience. […] Magneto’s utopia turns into a claustrophobic parody of itself. The episode is certainly an allegory of sovereign greed. But it signifies more. Magneto survives Cortez’s treachery and is restored to health through Earth’s magnetic field. He returns and thwarts the planned missile launch. But he also decides to destroy Asteroid M. Why? I sketch an answer in two mutually reinforcing parts. The first is a realization that mutanity’s utopian future is redeemed only through the destruction of Magneto’s own colonial project. The second is the acceptance of nonsovereign relationality inscribed as an acknowledged “us.” During the final scenes of the second episode, the Professor is hurriedly escaping with others on the Blackbird as Magneto sets his self-destructive plans in motion. He recites a plea to Magneto’s made dozens of times. Magneto declines and tells Charles that this event must be “seen [to] the end.” The tone of the expression feels almost underperformed. Magneto’s character has a flare for the direct. But he makes the ambiguous statement that “[i]n time, the world might have learned to trust us” Houston, X-Men: The Animated Series, 1995; see Saylor, “Author’s Transcript of Dialogue from ‘Sanctuary (Part 2).’”, transcription my own.

[...] The “us” in Magneto’s confession is as ambiguous as “the world.” It provides some room for speculation. I also want to consider the visual effects of superimposing the images of the Professor and Magento during the scene. The visual gulf that separates two beings is, indeed, engulfed. Viewers witness Magneto at his most transformed. This interval, however brief, suspends both friends-in-love within an ambience of intimacy. Charles and Magneto’s mutual engagement “manipulate[s] absence [and thereby] extends this interval to delay as long as possible the moment when the other might topple sharply from absence into death” Barthes, A Lover’s Discourse, 269. Charles witnesses Magneto’s ultimate expression of vulnerability as the purposeful destruction of Asteroid M. Magneto acknowledges Charles as a harbinger of one vision of many utopian visions for mutanity. He ends their link reassuringly: “I will survive this” Houston, X-Men: The Animated Series, 1995; see Saylor, “Author’s Transcript of Dialogue from ‘Sanctuary (Part 2).’”, transcription my own. He desires to allay the Professor’s anxieties. The underlying message is that they will meet again. Magneto had been undone and recomposed by the world and brought back into being through a suspended scene that superimposed discontinuous images. Queer love is the vulnerability of learning that we are already and always vulnerable to one another. […]

IV. Conclusion

[...] Magneto was right. He was right to emancipate mutants from their unjust incarceration. He was right to act as abolitionist. But Magneto was myopic. His vision failed for counterintuitive reasons. His sovereign fantasy corrupted poetics that might have kept those utopian horizons open. He learned that social transformations cannot begin or end at the limits of selfhood. Asteroid M represents a dramatized visualization of what the immanent project of dismantling social inequality might require. These projects cannot merely reform. Reforms flatten histories, forsake differences, and cede to desires for power. Magneto realized this and cast his own colonial project of Asteroid M into Earth’s oceanic, and purifying, void.

V. Works Cited


There are moments that break with this convention. The second part of “One Worth Man’s Worth” Houston, X-Men: The Animated Series, 1995, presents us with an altered timeline. Storm and Wolverine are brought together in an interracial romance. Storm experiences the color line’s anti-miscegenation and misogynoir at full force. They were thrown into the early 1960s. Storm, in a kind of recessive affect (as being from the future such instances hardly if ever occur) remarks that the bartender’s “quaint” reaction to her presence with Wolverine was racism. In characteristic machismo, Wolverine didn’t take kindly when commanded they leave. Director Larry Houston told a reporter that “Wolverine and Storm in that story [contained] one of the first interracial kisses, interracial marriages, in animation” Belt, “The Making of X-Men: The Animated Series.”