

FI943-30 Queer + Trans Theory for Film and TV

26/27

Department

SCAPVC – Film and Television Studies

Level

Taught Postgraduate Level

Module leader

Karl Schoonover

Credit value

30

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module explores queer and trans theories of the moving image. We will ask how these theories contributed to understandings of historical identity, political economy, and spectatorship. The module also covers debates around global queer liberation, LGBTQI+ representation in contemporary African cinema, and trans television.

Module aims

- Engage with queer and trans theory that can be used to understand film and TV.
- Consider the relationship queer theory and trans theory.
- Investigate how queer theory and trans theory interrogate traditional models of historiography.
- De-centre late twentieth- and early twenty-first- century Hollywood cinema as the primary site of queer and trans representation.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1: Is film trans?

Is film history trans? Is cinema historically trans?

This week asks what it means to locate the trans moving image text. How do we decide if a film is trans? Subtending these questions are at least three bold claims made in the readings and the documentary *Disclosure*: 1) film history is inherently trans; 2) a trans aesthetics can be found in the earliest moving images; and 3) the cinematic medium is inherently trans.

Screenings

Disclosure (Feder, USA, 2020, 1h 48min)

Other early cinema shorts

- *L'Illusionniste fin de siècle* (An Up-to-Date Conjuror, Méliès, 1899, 1 min)
- *Les Verres enchantés* (The Enchanted Glasses, de Chomón, 1907, 4 mins)
- *How Percy Won the Beauty Competition* (Collins, 1909, 7 mins)
- *A Woman* (Chaplin, 1915, 25 mins)

Essential readings:

- Steinbock, Eliza. 'Towards Trans Cinema'. In *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Gender*, edited by Kristin Lené Hole, Dijana Jelača, E. Ann Kaplan, and Patrice Petro. New York: Routledge, 2017. EBOOK
- Leung, Helen Hok-sze. 'Film.' *TSQ* 1 May 2014; 1 (1-2): 86–89
- Horak, Laura, 'Trans Studies' *Feminist Media Histories* 1 April 2018; 4 (2): 201–206. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2018.4.2.201>
- Samer, Rox, "Trans Chaplin", *JCMS: Journal of cinema and media studies*, 2022, 61: 2: 175-180. DOI: 10.1353/cj.2022.0002

Further reading:

- Chris O'Rourke, "'What a Pretty Man – or Girl!': Male Cross-Dressing Performances in Early British Cinema, 1898–1918", *Gender & History*, 32:1 (2020), 86-107: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12467>

Week 2: Queer bodies in motion

finding queer bodies in film history: sapphic movement and sexuality effects

This week uncovers a world of queer movement in silent films. We explore animation – i.e., arguably the essence of cinema – in a variety of forms. Looking at examples from live action silent films to some of the first sound cartoons, we will examine how particularly sapphic and other forms of queer effects flourish on screen decades before Stonewall and other queer liberation movements.

Screening:

- *Phil for Short* (Apfel, 1919, 82 mins)
- Additional shorts:
- *A Range Romance* (US, 1911, 12 mins)
 - *Danse Serpentine* (Lumière, 1896, 1 min)
 - *Loïe Fuller* (Pathé, 1905, 1 min)
 - *Silly Symphonies: Springtime* (Walt Disney Prod., USA, 1929)

Essential readings:

- Maggie Hennefeld, 'Queer Laughter in the Archives of Silent Film Comedy', in Ronald Gregg and Amy Villarejo (eds), *The Oxford Handbook to Queer Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 93-121.
- Susan Potter, *Queer Timing: The Emergence of Lesbian Sexuality in Early Cinema* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020), ch. 5, 'Looking Backward: Loïe Fuller and the Virtual Erotics of Spectatorship' (pp. 101-121).
- Kiki Loveday, 'Do You Believe in Fairies? Cabbages, Victorian Memes, and the Birth of Cinema: Seeing Sapphic Sexuality in the Silent Era', in Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta (eds), *Women Film Pioneers Project* (New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2019): <https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-f1sh-k143>.

Further reading:

- Laura Horak, *Girls Will Be Boys: Cross-Dressed Women, Lesbians, and American Cinema, 1908-1934* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016).
- David Lugowski, 'A Duet for Sailors and Pansies: Queer Archival Work and Male Same-Sex Dancing in *Follow the Fleet* (1936) and Other Depression-Era Films', in Gregg and Villarejo, *The Oxford Handbook to Queer Cinema*, pp. 187-21.

Week 3: Queer film authorship

auteurs working queerly

This week takes a fresh look at the debates in film studies about authorship and the concept of the auteur in light of queer scholarship on the subject. Does it matter if a filmmaker is or isn't queer? Who or what is the 'author' of a film anyway? We will also consider what kind of challenges early cinema and the production culture of studio-era Hollywood pose for theorising queer authorship.

Screening:

Salome (Bryant, 1923, 63 mins)

Plus excerpts from *Ziegfeld Follies* (Minnelli, et al, 1944) and *Yolanda and the Thief* (Minnelli, 1945)

Essential readings:

- Richard Dyer, 'Believing in Fairies: The Author and the Homosexual' [1991], in *The Culture of Queers* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 31-45.
- Patricia White, 'Nazimova's Veils: *Salome* at the Intersections of Film History', in Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra (eds), *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 60-87.
- Matthew Tinkcom, 'Working Like a Homosexual: Vincente Minnelli in the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Freed Unit', in *Working Like a Homosexual: Camp, Capital, Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 35-71. You might also find it useful to read the introduction to this book.

Further reading:

- Judith Mayne, 'A Parallax View of Lesbian Authorship', in Diana Fuss (ed.), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 173-184.
- Judith Mayne, 'Lesbian Looks: Dorothy Arzner and Female Authorship', in *Bad Object-Choices* (ed.), *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), pp. 103-135.
- Andy Medhurst, 'That Special Thrill: Brief Encounter, Homosexuality and Authorship', *Screen*, 32:2 (1991), 197-208.

- Curran Nault, 'Three Dollar Cinema: The Down and Dirty DIY of Queer Production', *Journal of Film and Video*, 70:3-4 (2018), 63-84 (part of a special issue on Queer Production Studies).

Week 4: Sensing trans authorship

the affective registers of the trans auteur text

Expanding on our work on queer authorship and queer labour in Week 3, this week explores an experimental approach to auteur studies, looking at Keegan's innovative project to trace the Wachowski sisters' trans authorship via sensory registers and affects.

Screening:

Bound (Lana and Lily Wachowski, USA, 1996)

Plus excerpts from The Matrix (Lana and Lily Wachowski, USA, 1999) and Sense8 (Lana and Lily Wachowski, USA, 2015–2018)

Essential readings:

- Keegan, Cáel M., 'Sensing Transgender', excerpt from the book Lana and Lilly Wachowski. *Contemporary Film Directors*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018: pp. 1-47 in print edition; or pp. 1-28 in the EBOOK version.
- Keegan, Cáel M., "Epilogue--Event Horizon: Sense8" excerpt from the book Lana and Lilly Wachowski.

Week 5: Queer Africa I

- Kwame Edwin Otu (2021) Heteroerotic Failure and "Afro-queer Futurity" in Mohamed Camara's *Dakan*, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 33:1, 10-25, DOI: 10.1080/13696815.2020.1792279
- narratives of identity

This week looks at some of "the firsts" of Sub-Saharan African queer cinema to examine how they imagine the future of desire and identity. The discussion of *Dakan* complicates how Sub-Saharan African cinema aesthetics were originally defined, suggesting that the film both expands and complicates notions of Third Cinema.

Screening:

Dakan (Destiny, Mohamed Camara, Guinea, 1997)

- Recommended additional viewing: *Rafiki* (Wanuri Kahiu, Kenya, 2018)

Essential readings:

- Green-Simms, Lindsey, *Queer African Cinemas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2022)
- "Introduction: Registering Resistance in Queer African Cinemas" (pp. 1-36)
- "Coda: Queer African Cinema's Destiny" (pp. 203-210)
- Kwame Edwin Otu (2021) Heteroerotic Failure and "Afro-queer Futurity" in Mohamed Camara's *Dakan*, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 33:1, 10-25, DOI: 10.1080/13696815.2020.1792279

Further reading:

- Leung, Helen Hok-Sze, 'New Queer Cinema and Third Cinema' in *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*, Michele Aaron (ed.), (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 155–68.

- Schoonover, Karl, and Galt, Rosalind, Chapter 3, "Speaking Otherwise" in *Queer Cinema in the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
- A review of *Dakan: the first West African gay-themed film*, *nostringsng* (2018)
<https://nostringsng.com/dakan-film-review-west-african-gay/>, accessed: 7 February 2022.
- Dukule, Abdoulaye, 'Film Reviews (Reviewed Work: *Dakan* by Mohamed Camara)', *African Studies Review* 44:1 (April 2001), pp. 119-121.
- Green-Simms, Lindsey, 'Queer African Cinema, Queer World Cinema', *College Literature*, 45:4 (Fall 2018), pp. 652-658.

Week 7: Queer Africa II

documentary practices and the short

African queer experiences and narratives have become visible to continental and global audiences via documentary practices and short films. This week examines the variety of documentary practices over a twenty year period.

Screening:

Wuobi Cheri (Laurent Bocahut and Philip Brooks, Côte d'Ivoire. 1998, 1h 2m)

I am Sheriff (Teboho Edkins, South Africa, 2017, 28m 55s)

The Man in Me (Marianne Gysae, Lesotho, 2015, 15m 26s)

Reluctantly Queer (Akosua Adoma Owusu, Ghana / USA, 2016, 8m 44s)

Stories of Our Lives (The Nest Collective, Kenya, 2014, 1h)

Essential readings:

- Green-Simms, Lindsey and Z'étoile Imma, 'The Possibilities and Intimacies of Queer African Screen Cultures', *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 33:1 (December 2020), pp. 1-9.
In addition to Green-Simms / Imma, please choose two articles or one book from further reading, read and report in class:
- Amory, Deborah P. "'Homosexuality" in Africa: Issues and Debates', *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 25:1 (1997), pp. 5-10.
- Botha, Martin P., "The New African Queer Aesthetics" *Kinema* Spring 2008
<https://doi.org/10.15353/kinema.vi.1194>
- Botha, Martin P., "Queering African film aesthetics: a survey from 1950s to 2003" in *Critical Approaches to African Cinema Discourse*, edited by Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, 63-86. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2014.
- Decker, Corrie, 'Love and Sex in Islamic Africa: Introduction', *Africa Today* 61:4 (Summer 2015), pp. 1-10.
- Desai, Gaurav, "Out in Africa," in *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*, edited by John C. Hawley (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001): 139-164.
- Dlamini, Busangokwakhe, 'Homosexuality in the African Context', *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 67:2-3 (2006), pp. 128-36.
- Epprecht, Marc, 'Sexuality, Africa, History', *The American Historical Review* 114:5 (December 2009), pp. 1258-72.
- Ekine, Sokari, and Hakima Abbas, eds. *Queer African Reader*. Nairobi, Kenya: Pambazuka Press, 2013.
- Fiereck, Kirk, Neville Hoad, and Danai Mupotsa, 'A Queering-to-Come', *GLQ* 26:3 (June 2020), pp. 363-376.
- Fiereck, Kirk, Neville Hoad, and Danai Mupotsa, 'Time out of Joint: The Queer and the Customary in Africa [Special Issue]', *GLQ* 26:3 (June 2020).

- Hoad, Neville, *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality and Globalization* (Minnesota, 2007)
- Livermon, Xavier, 'Queerying Freedom: Black Queer Visibilities in Postapartheid South Africa', *GLQ* 18:2-3 (June 2012), pp. 297–323.
- Macharia, Keguro, 'Queer Kenya in Law and Policy', *Queer African Reader* (2012), pp. 273-289.
- Monro, Surya (ed.), Matebeni, Zethu (ed.), Reddy, Vasu (ed.), *Queer in Africa: LGBTQI Identities, Citizenship, and Activism* (England: Routledge, 2018).
- Munro, Brenna, 'Pleasure in Queer African Studies: Screenshots of the Present', *College Literature* 45:4 (Fall 2018), pp. 659-666.
- Nyeck, S.N., *Routledge Handbook of Queer African Studies* (Routledge, 2020)
- Rosen, Philip, 'Notes on Art Cinema and the Emergence of Sub-Saharan Film' in *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (2010).
- Spronk, Rachel (ed.), Thomas Hendriks (ed.), *Readings in Sexualities from Africa* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2020).
- Migraine-George, Thérèse. "Beyond the 'Internalist' vs. 'Externalist' Debate: The Local-Global Identities of African Homosexuals in Two Films, 'Woubi Chéri' and 'Dakan.'" *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 16, no. 1 (2003): 45–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3181384>.

Week 8: Queer Africa III

extraction economies and afro-futurism

In the third and final week of our unit on Queer Africa, we use a very recent film as a test case, asking, is this an African film? Is this a queer film? We will also consider what the representation of queer and intersex lives contributes to the geopolitics of extraction and the eco-catastrophes of late capitalism.

Screening:

Neptune Frost (Anisia Uzeyman and Saul Williams, 2021)

Essential readings:

- Xuanlin Tham interview with Anisia Uzeyman and Saul Williams 'Neptune Frost, the Afrofuturist Musical Imagining Life Beyond Capitalism', *AnOther*, November 03, 2022.
- Simran Hans, "Neptune Frost: an exuberant, deeply political afrofuturist musical [review]", *Sight and Sound*, December 2020:70
- Cajetan Iheka, *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics* (Duke UP, 2021).
 - o Introduction
 - o Chapter 1. Waste Reconsidered. Afrofuturism, Technologies of the Past, and the History of the Future
 - o Chapter 3. Ecologies of Oil and Uranium. Extractive Energy and the Trauma of the Future
- Keeling, Kara. *Queer Times, Black Futures*. New York University Press, New York, NY, 2019.

Week 9: Trans temporalities

queer time

Does the shape of queer and trans lives require a different means of representing time? How do conventional cinematic modes of temporality limit the depiction of queer and trans living? What is the best way of mapping queer growth? What are the best means of representing trans childhood in moving images?

Screening:

A Deal with the Universe (Jason Barker, UK, 2018)

Essential readings:

- Halberstam, Jack. *Trans: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2018:
 - o “Trans* Representation [Chapter 5]”
 - o “Trans* Generations [Chapter 4]”
 - o “Becoming Trans* [Chapter 3]”
- Laura Horak, “Trans on YouTube: Intimacy, Visibility, Temporality” *TSQ* 1 November 2014; 1 (4): 572–585. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2815255>

Additional viewing

- *Tomboy* (Céline Sciamma, France, 2011)
- *Ma vie en rose* (Alain Berliner, Belgium/France, 1997)
- *No Ordinary Man* (Aisling Chin-Yee, Chase Joynt, 2020)
- *By Hook or by Crook* (Harry Dodge, Silas Howard, 2001)

Further reading

- Halberstam, J. ‘Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies’ in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, 1–21. New York: New York University Press, 2005.
- Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, chapter 1
- Schoonover, Karl, and Galt, Rosalind, “The Emergence of Queer Cinematic Time” in *Queer Cinema in the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016)

Week 10: Bad Objects

what do bad objects teach us?

Keegan’s recent work looks at what have been dismissed as offensive or problematic films and poses this critical question. In this week, we will carefully consider Keegan’s examples and then discuss the potential(s) of our own bad objects.

Screening:

Tootsie (Sidney Pollack, USA, 1982) 1h 56m

Activity: bring an exemplary clip of a bad object (2 min or less) and argue for its critical necessity.

Essential readings:

- Keegan, Cael M., “On the Necessity of Bad Trans Objects” *Film Quarterly* (2022) 75 (3): 26–37. <https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2022.75.3.26>
- Keegan, Cael M., “In Praise of the Bad Transgender Object” in three parts:
 - o 1) *Rocky Horror* <https://www.flowjournal.org/2019/11/in-praise-of-the-bad/>
 - o 2) *Silence of the Lambs* <https://www.flowjournal.org/2020/06/in-praise-of-the-bad-silence/>
 - o 3) *Sleepaway Camp* <https://www.flowjournal.org/2020/07/in-praise-of-the-bad-sleepaway/>
- Talk: <https://carleton.ca/transmedialab/2022/video-cael-m-keegan-bad-trans-objects/>

Additional viewing (please watch with caution):

- *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, UK/USA, 1975)
- *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, USA, 1991)
- *Sleepaway Camp* (Robert Hiltzik, USA, 1983)

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate an advanced knowledge of the scholarly debates around queer and trans screen representation.
- Explain the allegiances and tensions among queer theory and trans theory.
- Write analysis sensitive to the range of ways queerness and/or trans-ness show up on screen.
- Demonstrate an advanced awareness of queer and trans film/tv history.
- Provide analysis in essay writing and presentation that engages with the relationship between text and political history in a nuanced fashion.

Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

[Specific reading list for the module](#)

Research element

Presentation and essay, along with various weekly seminar activities.

Interdisciplinary

This module includes readings from a variety of methodologies: history, film theory, TV studies, social theory, queer theory, Trans theory, LGBTQAI+ studies.

International

The module works to de-centre the Western canons of queer and trans filmmaking. At its core are theories, methods, and histories devised by non-Western scholars.

Subject specific skills

- Ability to compare various research methodologies.
- Advance skills of film and TV analysis
- Capacity to understand and engage with theoretical paradigms

Transferable skills

- Advanced archival research skills.
- Analysis and evaluation of film / tv techniques.
- Awareness of difference and its values.
- Ability to navigate complex debates around gender, sexuality, and equality.

Study

Study time

Type	Required	Optional
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (3%)	
Seminars	9 sessions of 3 hours (9%)	
Tutorials	2 sessions of 30 minutes (0%)	8 sessions of 15 minutes
Other activity	22 hours 30 minutes (7%)	
Private study	240 hours 30 minutes (80%)	
Total	300 hours	

Private study description

Students will be asked to read rigorously each week, including selections from the supplemental readings. They are expected to write a substantial final essay and make a polished presentation.

Other activity description

Screenings

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessment component			
Final Essay	90%		Yes (extension)
Topic of students choice, relating to the themes of the module and utilising the central readings as well as independent research.			

Weighting

Study time

Eligible for self-certification

Reassessment component is the same

Assessment component

Presentation

10%

Yes (extension)

These presentations are meant to give students the chance to introduce us to the ideas for the final essay. In the presentation, they will be asked to introduce your topic, take us through their argument, and explain their scope. They should also talk us through the existing scholarly from which they are drawing and any other “archives” used. The presentation should use a powerpoint with some text, screen grabs and a short clip (less than 2 mins).

Guiding questions to help generate ideas for your presentation.

What are your main research questions? What are their origins? In other words, what motivated you to ask these particular questions?

How are you defining your project’s central parameters?

- Historical period? Geographic boundaries?
- Why are these particular parameters necessary to your argument?
What critical concepts / theories are central to your argument?
From which existing scholarly work are you drawing?
What challenges are you facing for which we might brainstorm solutions?
- The criteria for presentations can be found in the appendixes for the PG Student Handbook.

Reassessment component is the same

Feedback on assessment

Feedback will include both in a general summative comment, in-text comments, and the option of a tutorial in which the written feedback can be discussed further.

Availability

Courses

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 1 of TFIA-W5P3 Postgraduate Taught Film and Television Studies (For Research)