

RTF 331R/390Q unique # 08205/08645 -- An ACTLab course

TRANS

Dangerous Border Violations

www.actlab.utexas.edu/trans

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Class meets in the ACTLab Monday 1:00-4:00

Summary:

This course is an exploration into the media and technologies of transition, with emphasis on transgender and transsexuality across cultures and throughout history. We will: conduct a global historical survey of the practices of transsexual and transgendered people from antiquity to the present; review changes in scientific perspectives on the design and significance of the male/female body as well as intersexed and transsexual bodies; discuss gender, prosthetics, cyborgs, and the relation of the posthuman to media production; and explore the function of the transsexual figure in films, pulp fiction, and popular culture. You will produce physical and/ or digital projects, including video and film, as well as research papers, in line with the ACTLab emphasis on making.

Class is in studio and discussion format. This means that your active participation is a requirement of the course. During the semester I expect you to contribute your own ideas and arguments to the discussions, and to be willing to take the risks such contributions imply.

There are no written exams. Instead you will use the theories and tools you acquire during the semester to **make stuff** about some aspect of Trans. What you make can be in any form: sound, installation, film, video, computer animation, digital-fu, collage, sculpture, assemblage, performance -- you name it. You will do this in stages, starting with simple projects and moving to more complex ones, using humor, irony, uncommon approaches, and bizarre techniques.

You will make a total of three projects: two relatively small projects and one larger final project. They are due at roughly four week intervals during the semester.

Take risks! Amaze us! In ACTLab New Media courses we assume a high level of motivation on your part and your willingness to self-start, set your own goals, think independently, collaborate with others, seek help when you need it, and take risks. Let's make it an interesting semester!

Readings and Resources:

The following book is required for the course, and available through Amazon.com. You will have plenty of time for it to arrive before we start using it.

Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (Eds.): *The Transgender Studies Reader*

The following books are not required but are important and will be referenced during the semester. If you are seriously studying Trans, you should have these.

Leslie Feinberg: *Stone Butch Blues*

Michel Foucault: *Herculine Barbin*

Judith Halberstam: *Female Masculinity*

Ann Fausto-Sterling: *Sexing the Body*

Alice Donurat Dreger: *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*

Graduate students may optionally read these additional books, if you haven't already:

Deleuze and Guattari: A Thousand Plateaux
Michel Foucault: Birth of the Clinic

There will be two required packets of xeroxed readings available during the second week of class. If you prefer reading from a screen you can download a .pdf version from the TRANS website, <http://home.actlab.utexas.edu/trans>. A dead tree version will be available from Jenn's Copies, across Guadalupe from our building.

Critical information

The following six things are *required* for you to receive a grade:

1. Attendance at all classes.
2. Reading all assignments and coming to class prepared.
3. Participation in discussion.
4. Successful completion of two mini-projects and one final project.
5. Successful completion of documentation. See **documentation requirement** below.
6. Full cleanup of the ACTLab following final presentations. Leave it the way you found it -- no better, no worse.

Documentation requirement:

You must provide complete documentation of your work in the form of a web site. A web site consists of a home page that says something about you, and additional pages for each project as necessary.

Documentation means a description of each project, how it was made, its relationship to the readings and discussions (i.e., its theoretical grounding), your thoughts about the project, etc., together with sound recordings, video, and/or still photos of the work in progress and the completed project.

You will make the web site in four stages. Each stage consists of documentation of one of the three projects, plus a fourth stage consisting of the homepage with your bio, external links, and whatever additional information you think is relevant. Stages one and two are due in class the week following project presentations one and two. Stages three and four are due no later than 5:00 p.m. December 16.

Your web site and all its content must be on the actlab server, nowhere else. No links to your own content on other servers are allowed, although you may provide "for further information" links to other web sites. Absolutely no links to UT WebSpace are allowed, because WebSpace is ephemeral and will break your actlab site later.

All sound files, videos, links, etc., must work, and video and audio must stream. Videos should be in QuickTime format using Sorensen3 compression hinted for streaming.

We suggest you look at other actlab students' websites, such as <http://home.actlab.utexas.edu/~samanthap02> or <http://home.actlab.utexas.edu/~mckibben>, to see what they did.

Grading:

Participation in discussion	25%
First mini-project	5%
Second mini-project	20%
Final project	25%
Documentation (Web site)	25%
Total	100%

End of critical information

Mailing list: Outside of class time we keep in touch via the Trans class mailing list. Use it to swap ideas, ask questions, get and give alerts of schedule changes, share weird urls, and whatever else you can think of. Be sure to give us your email address on the first day of class.

Things we supply: In addition to the usual video and sound equipment, the ACTLab New Media digital equipment (in cmb 4.110) is there for you to use, play with, and experiment with. A lot of it is state-of-the-art. Don't waste the opportunity to stretch your creative skills in the digital domain. We have computers, DJ turntables, quadraphonic sound system, and other stuff. We'll try to help you locate odd and exotic items you may think of during the semester that you'd like to use. We also have some gear that we've never used yet, and we invite you to play with it and see what you can make it do.

Things you'll need:

Miscellaneous construction materials (for class date TBA). Anything else you stumble on or think might be useful to make evocative objects about Trans. Loose clothing that you can get dirty. If we do narrative or sound work in the dark, remember the ACTLab floor is hard; so if you decide to listen while lying down on the floor, bring something soft to lie on.

What I expect from you during discussion:

1. Ask or talk about the parts of the text that you made notes about.
2. Participate. Talk. Ask. Argue. Laugh. (some of the readings are ludicrous.) None of this stuff is holy, none of the opinions are cast in concrete.
3. Bring in stuff -- maybe text, maybe just stuff -- that you feel relates to the reading. Throw it on the table, say why it's there, and see what happens.
4. My main job during discussion is to listen. My role is to make an opening or framing statement to start from. I'll guide when necessary, and clarify tough points. Discussion time gives me my best sense of how you're thinking about the theoretical part of our work together.

Participation is one of the keys to success in this class. You can't participate in discussion in a real way unless you've done the reading. Consequently Rule Number One is: Do The Reading!

Experienced Labbies say: One of the worst mistakes you can make is to leave the documentation for the last minute! Start thinking about your web site from the very first class day. Keep notes about your ideas for it, so you'll have a good supply as you build the page.

Films: We see films and excerpts from films in class, but only a few are scheduled here. We'll choose the rest in class, based on what we think would be useful or interesting or fun or all of the above.

Course Schedule

Sept 10: Introduce ourselves. Discussion of what's at stake. Here's a list of things to think about. In a very general way, they are the workpoints we'll be bouncing off and around during the semester:

- A) What is SEXUALITY?
- B) What is TRANS?
- C) Communicating the Transsexual Body: Transmedia
 - 1) Performing the body
 - a) Trans in Pre-Christian Tribal Rituals
 - b) Contemporary Art by Transpersons

- c) The Trans Body as Living Architecture
- 2) The Transsexual Body Performed
- a) Transfigures in Literary History
- b) Transfigures in Cinema

- D) Bodies In Time: History, Communities, and the Globalization of Trans
- a) Building International Networks
- b) The Packaging of Trans

Order *The Transgender Studies Reader!*

Sept 17: TRANSBEINGS IN TIMESPACE I

Location Location Location! Where were we?

A historical survey of the changing perspectives of the sexual body in Western culture from the Greeks to Modernism. Points for discussion:

- A) What is SEXUALITY?
- B) What is TRANS?
- C) Communicating the Transsexual Body: Transmedia
 - 1) Performing the body
 - a) Trans in Pre-Christian Tribal Rituals
 - b) Contemporary Art by Transpersons
 - c) The Trans Body as Living Architecture
 - 2) The Transsexual Body Performed
 - a) Transfigures in Literary History
 - b) Transfigures in Cinema
- D) Bodies In Time: History, Communities, and the Globalization of Trans
 - a) Building International Networks
 - b) The Packaging of Trans

Reading:

Gilbert Herdt, *Third Sex, Third Gender*, Introduction, in the xeroxed reader

Chapters 3, 4, 5 of *Transgender Warriors*, in the xeroxed reader

Chapter 3 of Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex*, the book's pp. 84-192 in the xeroxed reader

Chapters One and Two of Serena Nanda, *Gender Diversity: Crosscultural Variations*, the book's pp. 11-41 in xeroxed reader

Sept 24: TRANSBEINGS IN TIMESPACE II

Location Location Location! Where are we?

Reading:

T. Benjamin Singer, "From The Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations", in the *Transgender Studies Reader*

Riki Anne Wilchins, "What Does It Cost To Tell The Truth?", in the *Transgender Studies Reader*

Rita Felski, "Fin de Siecle, Fin du Sexe", in the *Transgender Studies Reader*

Discuss first project. Anti-panic drill for those who need it.

First project equipment requests: If you need equipment, make sure you coordinate with Joe no later than October 1.

Oct 1: TRANS AS SEEN BY FEMINISM, GENDER STUDIES, AND QUEER THEORY

Kate Bornstein, "Gender Terror, Gender Rage", in the *Transgender Studies Reader*
Janice Raymond, "Sappho by Surgery: The Transsexually Constructed Lesbian-Feminist", in the *Transgender Studies Reader*

Sandy Stone, "The *Empire Strikes Back*: A Posttranssexual Manifesto", in the *Transgender Studies Reader* or online at

<http://sandystone.com/empire-strikes-back>

Portions of Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto*, in the *Transgender Studies Reader*

Grad students: Judith Butler, "What is Woman", in *Gender Trouble*. If you don't own the book or can't get it, read *Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality*, in the *Transgender Studies Reader*

Oct 8: FIRST MINI-PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

Oct 15: FIRST WEB PAGE DUE

In-class review of web pages

Today's topic: TECHNOLOGY AND BECOMING

Clinic vs. Chora: weird science, the space of invention, and the antiseptic womb

Readings:

Harry Benjamin, "Transsexualism and Transvestism as Psycho-somatic and Somato-psychic Syndromes", in the *Transgender Studies Reader*

David O. Cauldwell, "Psychopathia Transexualis", in the *Transgender Studies Reader*

Oct 22: Lessons from the Intersexed, Part I: Pathology of the Other

A) "Corrective" / Normalizing technology on intersexed infants

B) Discussion of Gender Identity Disorder and "corrective surgeries"

Readings:

Chapters 3, 4, 5 of Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex*, the book's pp. 63-192 in the xeroxed reader

Deleuze/Guattari, "Becoming Woman: The Tenth Plateau" (to be handed out)

Graduate Students: Martin Heidegger, "A Question Concerning Technology"

Video:

"*Surgical Construction of Ambiguous Genitalia*", a medical training video. Not for the faint of heart.

Lessons from the Intersexed, Part II: I Am Not a Disorder

Videos:

Emergency

Hermaphrodites Speak!

Oct 29: This and That

A) F2M

Transmen, Bois, Butches, and Kings

Readings:

Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* chapters 1-5 (to be handed out)

Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues* (excerpts) (to be handed out)

Video:

Southern Comfort
The Theo Project (part)

BREAK

B) M2F

Transwomen, Tranniegirls, Transgenderists, Crossdressers, and Drag Queens

Crossing over to the same side: Is transsexuality possible without transgender?

Femmes, Gay male butches, penis and breast implants, the body modification community

Readings:

Jordy Jones, "Gender Without Genitals: Hedwig's Six Inches", in the *Transgender Studies Reader*

Excerpts from *Modcon: The Secret World of Extreme Body Modification*. (to be handed out)

Lewis, *Leather Daddies, Bodybuilders, Strippers, Femmes, and Self-Identified 'Freaks': the issues of hypergendered performativity and non-gender transformative sexual surgery*. (to be handed out)

Second project equipment requests: If you need equipment, make sure you coordinate with Joe no later than November 5.

Nov 5: Readings TBA

Video: *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (only if most of the class hasn't seen it)

Nov 12: SECOND MINI-PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

Nov 19: Second web pages due

In-class web page review

Representing TransExperience

A) Pronoun Trouble: violence, language, and identity

Readings:.

Excerpts from S/he, Minnie Bruce Pratt (to be handed out)

Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Grad students should read it, undergrads should attempt it)

Canary Conn, *Canary: The Story of a Transsexual* (excerpt) (to be handed out)

Morris, *Conundrum* (excerpt) (to be handed out)

Relevant portion of Stone, *The Empire Strikes Back*

Nov 26: TRANSMEDIA

A) Drag royalty, performance art, and the aesthetics of self-invention

B) Performance art and transsexuality

Readings: Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* chapters 6-8 (to be handed out)

C) Transcinema

Videos: TBA

D) Cybertrans

Readings:

Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (excerpt) (to be handed out)

Stelarc, *Post-Human Manifesto* (to be handed out)

Final Presentation equipment requests: If you need equipment for your final presentation, make sure you coordinate with Joe no later than today.

Dec 3: THE FUTURE OF TRANSMEDIA, TRANSART, POSTTRANS, POSTPOSTTRANS, TRANSPORTTRANS, TRANPTRANSPORT, TRANSTRANSTRANS... uh...

The Day of Digestion, class discussion, debate, everyone being showoffs

Sunday, December 9: FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Sunday, December 16: Drop Dead Date for documentation and web pages

Dec 18, 9:00 a.m.: Drop Dead Date for professors to submit grades. You know what that means.

The Fine Print:

This syllabus is V.2.1. It may be updated as necessary. Once the class has met, based on the skills, proclivities, and wishes of its members, I may, and probably will, modify the reading assignments and discussion topics. If I do, you will receive notice about the new readings and discussion topics far enough in advance that you will have no difficulty in keeping up with such changes.

Regarding Scholastic Dishonesty: The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. For more information on scholastic dishonesty, please visit the Student Judicial services Web site at <http://www.utexas.edu/depts/dos/sjs/>.

About services for students with disabilities: The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-4641 TTY.

About the Undergraduate Writing Center: The Undergraduate Writing Center, located in the FAC 211, phone 471-6222, offers individualized assistance to students who want to improve their writing skills. There is no charge, and students may come in on a drop-in or appointment basis.

Warning: This class may contain explicit descriptions of, or may advocate simulations of, one or more of the following: Nudity, satanism, suicide, sodomy, incest, bestiality, sadomasochism, adultery, murder, morbid violence, paedophilia, bad grammar, deviate sexual conduct in a violent context, the use of illegal drugs or alcohol, or offensive behavior. But then again, it may not. Should your sensibilities be offended at any time, you are free to leave the classroom without penalty provided that you notify either the instructor or teaching assistant when you do so.

Caution: Fragile: Do not bend, fold, spindle or mutilate. May be hazardous to your health. Not recommended for children. Do not purchase if seal has been tampered with. Not responsible for direct, indirect, incidental or consequential damages resulting from any defect, error or failure to perform. May be too intense for some viewers. Batteries not included. For recreational use. An equal opportunity employer. Some settling of contents may occur during shipping. Use only as directed. No other warranty expressed or implied. No postage necessary if mailed in the United States. Substantial penalty for early withdrawal. Slightly higher in California. Keep away from fire or flame. Any rebroadcast, reproduction, or other use of this game without the express written consent of Major League Baseball is prohibited. Please keep your hands and arms inside the car while ride is in motion. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. Contestants have been briefed before the show. Do not write below this line.