

Queer America?

Gay and Lesbian Identity in U.S. Popular Culture

Übung Cultural Studies (USA) 3CP
050704 M.A. Studium

Lecturer: PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt

Room and time: GABF 04/614 (Süd), Wednesdays 16-18

First session: April 22, 2009

Short description:

In the past few decades, 'queer' themes have become elevated to the center of the American popular imagination. Mainstream films such as *Philadelphia* (1994) and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) as well as television shows like *Will & Grace* (1998-2006), *Queer as Folk* (2000-2005), and *The L Word* (2004-2008) seem to negotiate gay and lesbian identity in a fashion compatible with 'mainstream' tastes. How can this recent interest of popular culture in queerness be explained? What function do such productions have with respect to general processes of cultural self-fashioning since the 1990s? Our analyses of U.S. representations of queerness will be linked to close readings of classic texts of queer theory such as Alexander Doty's *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (1993) and Annamarie Jagose's *Queer Theory* (1996). In discussions, we will discuss the cultural relevance of homosexuality in dominant Western culture as "socially peripheral, yet symbolically central," as Jonathan Dollimore phrased it in *Sexual Dissidence*.

Grading: Quality of class participation counts 1/3; expert session 1/3; final paper of five to eight pages 1/3. Poor attendance or class participation will negatively affect your grade.

Deadline for Final Papers: Friday, October 30, 2009. Note: There is no (!) extension of this deadline.

Syllabus:

- 22. April** **Cinematic Queerness as a History of Otherness**
The Celluloid Closet (1995, dir. Rob Epstein, based on Vito Russo's book)
- 29. April** **GLBT Identity and Queer Theory (1st theory session)**
Annamarie Jagose, "Queer", in: *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (1996) (available online)
- 06. May** **The Horror of Queerness**
Cruising (1980, dir. William Friedkin)
- 13. May** **AIDS and the Cinematic Portrayal of Otherness**
Philadelphia (1994, dir. Jonathan Demme)

- 20. May** **Queerness as Drag Comedy**
To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar (1995, dir. Beeban Kidron)
- 27. May** **Breaking the Conventions: Queerness and the American Western**
Brokeback Mountain (2005, dir. Ang Lee, based on Annie Proulx' short story)
- 03. June** **Pentecost Holiday (Pfingsten)**
Relax and enjoy!
- 10. June** **Queerness and Mass Culture (2nd theory session)**
 Alexander Doty, "Something Queer Here", from: *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (1997) (available online)
- 17. June** **Queer Fan Fiction: The Case of *Xena: Warrior Princess***
Xena: Warrior Princess (U.S. TV series, Universal Studios, 1995-2001)
 Debbie Cassetta a.k.a Mistopheles, "Into the Mix: Xena Nights, Subtext, and Misconceptions" (1998) (available online)
- 24. June** **Broadcasting Queerness: Homosexuality and the Sitcom**
Will & Grace (TV series, NBC, 1998-2006)
- 01. July** **The 'Queer Voice' on Television**
Queer as Folk (U.S./Canadian TV series, Showtime, 2000-2005)
- 08. July** **A 'Golden Age for Gay TV'?**
The L Word (U.S./Canadian TV series, Showtime, 2004-2009)
 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "The Letter L" & J. McCabe and K. Akass, "Preface", from: *Reading 'The L Word'* (eds. K. Akass & J. McCabe) (2006) (available online)
- 15. July** **Queerness and Romance**
Boy Culture (2006, dir. Q. Allan Brocka)
- 22. July** **Queering the Blockbuster**
Chuck & Larry (2007, dir. Dennis Dugan)