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Queer Space: Explorations in Art and Architecture

What is “queer space”? How have works of art and architecture shaped queer understandings and experiences of space?

This seminar will consider these questions across queer history and theory from the disciplinary vantage points of art, architecture, and visual culture. We will examine how a range of artists, architects, curators, critics, and other cultural practitioners have developed aesthetic and political strategies to engage with their spatial and built environments. Beyond ruminating on queer spatial aesthetics and form, we will navigate spaces of queer world-making (e.g. bathhouses, nightclubs, cruising grounds, alternative art venues, domestic settings, archives, memorials, the Internet), as well as spaces of queer appropriation (e.g. museums, campuses, streets, cityscapes, environments, borderlines). We will also explore the queer dimensions of space in relation to spatialized concepts of diaspora, (de)-colonization, globalization, gentrification, and climate change. In addition to writing a final research paper, students will have the opportunity to create an artwork or exhibition proposal.

**Expected Learning Outcomes**

1. Insights into the complexity of queer artistic, architectural, and cultural works, as well as their theorizations, particularly with regards to space.
2. An understanding of how these works relate to broader discourses and practices in modernism, post-modernism, and contemporary culture.
3. An ability to critically analyze and historically contextualize readings, art, and architecture within a web of ideological, socio-political, and intellectual forces and processes.
4. A capacity to formulate broad yet pointed research questions, as well as the knowledge of how to cultivate and apply methodological skillsets in conducting such research.
5. A grasp of how to use primary and secondary-source texts, images, and other cultural works to construct nuanced, original arguments.
6. A strong command of how to write about art, architecture, and visual culture in a clear, concise, and engaging way in essays, exhibition proposals, and artist statements.
7. An ability to participate in class discussion respectfully and responsively, with enthusiasm and intellectual rigor.
8. A deeper interest in the course material, as well as a desire to extend these academic conversations outside of the classroom, outside of Tufts, and into the world.
Student Evaluation

Though this course will be challenging, students need not have prior experience in the subject area. Artists and other practitioners are particularly encouraged to take part. Attendance and participation in discussion are fundamental requirements. Students will be asked to lead discussion with at least one other classmate twice during the semester; presentation groups will be determined in our earliest class meetings. For these occasions, students must provide some background on the author(s), situate the assigned readings in the context of the course thus far, extrapolate a few salient points, show relevant works of visual culture, and generate a few questions to spark a robust discussion. Presentations are most effective when coordinated outside of class beforehand.

This will be a writing-intensive seminar. Students will compose two critical response papers throughout the semester. The first must be handed in during the first third of the semester at the beginning of the class meeting, before the readings are discussed. The response paper will be a well-written, coherent document that historically contextualizes, critically assesses, and crafts an argument about the week’s themes; at least three texts must be discussed in depth. Students are welcome to draw on readings previously discussed in the course. Papers should be five pages in length. At the start of the semester, we will discuss and establish a clear framework for what these papers should consist of.

In addition to our regular seminar sessions, we will all be going to the “Future Genders” Max Wasserman Forum at the MIT List Visual Arts Center in November 2018. A rare exploration of past, present, and future gender identifications in relation to contemporary artistic practice, this event will feature many artists and thinkers that we will encounter on the syllabus. The second critical response paper, also five pages in length, will pivot around this event.

For the final assignment, students will be expected to produce a final paper, exhibition proposal, or artwork (with a textual component) on a topic related to the course subject and to their own research interests. Students will be encouraged to meet with the instructor during office hours for help determining a topic and sharpening research questions. Midway through the semester, students must turn in an abstract and bibliography for this final work so that the instructor can provide further feedback. At our final seminar meeting, students will make brief presentations and/or performances on these projects to the class. Final papers should be ten to twelve pages in length. Should students elect to make an artwork, there must be a textual component of seven pages—written in lucid academic writing—that intellectually positions the work in relation to our course-long investigations.
Grading
1. Class participation..................................................20%
2. Abstract and bibliography for final project............10%
3. Critical reading response paper.........................10%
4. Wasserman Forum response paper......................15%
5. Final project presentation.................................5%
6. Final project deliverable.................................40%
1. Queer Space: Introductory Frameworks

- What is “queer space”? What does this concept mean to you?
- What is its historiography like in queer theory, art, and architecture? How have these disciplines historically treated questions of (non-normative) gender and sexuality?
- How does the space vs. time treatment in queer theory play out in art and visual culture?
- What insights can the disciplinary perspectives of art and architecture offer us?
- How does context affect queer experience and articulation?
- How are “queer” and “trans” used differently as critical and theoretical terms, as well as modes of identification?


2. Cruising and the Spatialization of Sex

- In what ways have queer sex and eroticism had spatial dimensions across history?
- How has architecture contributed to the development (and erasure) of certain sexual subjectivities and practices?
- What roles have art and architecture played in processes of queer world-making in counterpublics? What roles have they played in social control, in policing gender and sexuality?


Please skim:

**3. Nightlife and Tourism**
- How were spaces of nightlife, sex, and tourism also sites of architectural production and aesthetic play?
- How did drugs, music, and technology impact queer experience in these spaces?
- Who had access to queer nightlife and tourism? How were spatial experiences bound up with material/economic forces and processes such as gentrification?
- Is Foucault’s notion of “heterotopia” useful for us in this course?


**4. Domesticities**
**Students must turn in first critical response paper by now.**
- How have queers inhabited, aesthetically articulated, and visually represented their domestic spaces? How have they subverted and embraced traditional gendered and sexualized understandings of domestic space? Is there a relationship between domesticity, interiority, and identity?
- How have art, architecture, and interior design worked together to create domestic experiences? What is the significance of collecting and curatorial practice?
- Under what circumstances do domestic lives become publicly disseminated and exhibited? How might this change our understandings of the artist and their oeuvre?

Davidow, Jackson. “Beyond the Binary: The Gender Neutral in JJ Levine’s *Queer*


5. Alternative Spaces of Making and World-Making

• What sites, spaces, and surfaces have queer artists and publics sought out to make and view art that might transgress social norms?
• How have these spaces facilitated and catalyzed new forms of art? How did these spaces enable particular modes of queer sociality?


6. The Archive

• What is an archive? Is the archive a spatialized site?
• When have artists intervened in archival practices and spaces, queerly? When have they instigated their own? What has this afforded them aesthetically, politically, institutionally?


7. Queer Abstraction and Spatial Aesthetics

- How can artworks and objects offer up queer theorizations of space? What spatial and aesthetic vocabularies have artists and critics relied on to evoke queer gender and sexuality in their work?
- What are the spatial connotations of queer abstraction?
- In our close readings of artworks, is it still possible to attend to the actual spaces of artistic production, dissemination, and reception?


8. Possibilities for a Queer Museum

- When and how did mainstream galleries and museums begin to show queer art?
- What tactics have curators and artists cultivated to queer exhibition practice?
- What is at stake when queer art becomes institutionally validated, institutionalized, and normalized?


Required viewing:

9. History and Intergenerational Memory
- What is the importance of queer monuments and memorials? How have they brought to light histories of trauma, oppression, and erasure? Do they function differently from archives and exhibitions?
- What potential do they have for intergenerational contact and learning? What continuities and discontinuities come into view?


10. Spaces of Resistance and Activism
- How have activist programs engaged with their environments to push for social change? What resonances and citations are there today?
- How did the AIDS crisis usher in new politicized understandings of space and the public sphere?
- Can art history and criticism be considered a form of activism?


11. Diasporas, Borders, Globalization
• How have queer artists used their work to address tender issues surrounding globalization, diasporas, and national borders? How have they conceived these topics in spatial terms?
• Has queer space been articulated differently on local, national, and global levels? Do Euro-American theorizations of queerness translate to other global cultural contexts?
• In what ways is art a privileged site for interrogating and undoing Westernist/universalist notions of queer gender and sexuality?


12. Environments, Ecologies, Landscapes
• How have queer artists grappled with the environment in various ways as a site of spatial scrutiny?
• In so doing, how have they contemplated subjects such as indigenous identity, climate change, extinction, and post-humanism?
• What historical idioms of visual representation have these artists drawn on?


**Required viewing:**
Shu Lea Cheang’s *Fresh Kill* (1994).

**13. Networks and New Subjectivities**
- Have notions of queer space morphed with the rise of new media technologies and digital culture?
- How has the Internet impacted the production of art and architecture? How has it impacted modes of queer sociality and subjectivity?
- Are there histories of queer artistic networks in which we might situate our contemporary moment?


Select Bibliography


