

Department of English and Cultural Studies
English and Cultural Studies 4AR3

Rhetoric, Culture, Catastrophe: HIV/AIDS and its Representations

Winter Term 2014

Dr. David L. Clark

Office Hours: CNH 210, Wednesday 1:30-2:30.
Classroom: CNH 332
Class time: Wednesday 10:30-12:20
E-mail: dclark@mcmaster.ca
Website: <http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~dclark/>



Francisco de Goya, *Self-Portrait With Dr. Arrieta* (1820)

Critical theorist and AIDS activist Douglas Crimp argues that "AIDS does not exist apart from the *practices* that conceptualize it, represent it, and respond to it."¹ Taking Crimp's counter-intuitive position as a provisional starting point, this course i) explores some of the problematical ways (i.e. practices and rhetorics) by which HIV/AIDS is represented, experienced, and understood, and ii) examines a selection of often wrenching autobiographical reflections, memoirs, and films by AIDS activists, care-workers, and people living with HIV and AIDS that explore dissenting representations and understandings of the epidemic. Our focus will be almost entirely on the epidemic as it first unfolded in North America, when many different communities were affected *but the community of gay men especially*. Keeping that particular focus in mind, we explore a range of texts from the tumultuous and consequential decade of the 1990's, when

the epidemic reached its peak in this part of the world, and when AIDS activism and queer theory came into its own. HIV/AIDS constitutes a crisis in every sense of the term: crisis of the body, crisis of sexuality, crisis of identity, crisis of the community, crisis of the nation-state, and crisis of representation. In what ways do we continue to live in the wake of those crises? This course begins with a consideration of some important theoretical discussions of HIV/AIDS as a catastrophic juncture that uniquely summons our critical powers as responsible students, teachers, and citizens. The underlying premise of the course is that the first step towards understanding HIV/AIDS in North America today is to explore the different ways it was engaged, worried, and represented during the first decade of the epidemic. In other words, this course explores a particular archive in the history of the representation of HIV/AIDS, a history whose problems and possibilities we have yet to supersede.

Texts and Films

*Brown, Rebecca. *The Gifts of the Body*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1995.

*Jarman, Derek. Dir. *Blue*. [Film will be screened in class.]

*Jarman, Derek. *Blue: Text of a Film by Derek Jarman*.
<http://www.evanizer.com/articles/blue/index.html>

*Demme, Jonathan. Dir. *Philadelphia*. TriStar Pictures, 1993. [Film will be screened in class.]

*Tom Joslin, Mark Massi, and Peter Friedman. Directors. *Silverlake Life: The View from Here*. Zeitgeist Films, 1993 [Film will be screened in class.]

*Kincaid, Jamaica. *My Brother*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1998.

Supplemental reading materials will be periodically posted on the coursepage:

<http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~dclark/courses.html>

Provisional Class Schedule

Jan	8	Prefatory remarks
	15	Visualize This: Introduction and Discussion
	22	<i>How to Survive A Plague</i> (screening)
	29	<i>How to Survive A Plague</i> (discussion)
Feb	5	Rebecca Brown, <i>Gifts of the Body</i>
	12	Jamaica Kincaid, <i>My Brother</i>
	19	No class / Reading Week
	26	<i>Silverlake Life</i> (screening)
Mar	5	<i>Silverlake Life</i> Discussion
	12	<i>Philadelphia</i> (screening)
	19	<i>Philadelphia</i> Discussion
	26	<i>Blue</i> (screening)
Apr	2	<i>Blue</i> Discussion

Work and Mark Distribution

Class Participation:	20%
Discussion Papers:	30% (2 Discussion Papers, each worth 15% [3-4 pages each])
Essay:	50% (10-15 pages)

Discussion Papers

For the Discussion Papers assignment, the class will be divided into two groups, Group A and Group B. All students are required to submit two Discussion Papers, due at different points depending on the Group to which you have been assigned.

What is a Discussion Paper? A Discussion Paper is a brief (i.e., 3-4 page) exploration of the materials assigned to each group. It begins with an outline the central focus and major characteristics of the text at hand, and then moves to a succinct discussion of a particular scene or moment that vividly captures some of that text's central worries, interests, and concerns. Special attention should be paid to the unique ways in which the question of HIV and AIDS is raised and explored in these texts. Discussion Papers must be submitted in class, at start of class, according to the following schedule:

- Group A Discussion Paper #1 (about *Gifts of the Body*): Due at start of class, 5 February 2014)
- Group B Discussion Paper #1 (about *My Brother*): Due at start of class, 12 February 2014)
- Group A Discussion Paper #2 and Group B Discussion Paper #2 (about *Silverlake Life*): Due at start of class, 5 March 2014

Essay Due Date and Late Submission Policy:

Essays are due in class, at start of class, Wednesday 19 March 2014. Essays submitted at this point will receive a marking commentary. Essays handed in after 19 March 2014 will be graded but without comment. Essays may be submitted up to Wednesday 2 April 2014, the last day of the course. No essays will be accepted after that class. A grade of zero/F will therefore be assigned to essays not submitted by class on 2 April 2014. No essays can be accepted as e-mail attachments.

If you are a smoker, please ensure that you print your essay in a smoke-free environment.

Ten Important Notes About the Course

1. Class cancellations:

In the unlikely event of a class cancellation, students will be notified via Avenue to Learn.

2. Active Seminar Participation and Creation

Although there is no roll-call, attendance in class is mandatory. Uneven class attendance will have a profound impact on your ability to thrive in the course and to do well in the term work.

Instead of delivering formal presentations, members of the class will be encouraged to *create*, on an ongoing basis, a *lively senior undergraduate seminar*—i.e. an inquisitive and informed space of critical labour, discussion, and debate. All students will therefore be expected to contribute consistently and meaningfully to the intellectual life of the seminar, developing and volunteering questions and arguments as well as responding mindfully to queries and challenges that are put to them by their classmates and by their instructor. Now, I realize that some of you may have chosen never to have spoken up in class before. Given the size and nature of your classes in previous years, you may never have ever been given an opportunity to do so. But all that changes now. Senior undergraduate seminars in our program are purposefully structured to involve you in the week-to-week life of the class. So it's crucially important to inhabit the course, and to shift from being an active listener in the classroom to an active participant. Let me hear your voice. Let your classmates hear your voice. If you feel anxious or unsure about speaking up, then start with something that intrigues you. For example, point the class to a particular moment in the materials at hand that you find puzzling, difficult, worrisome, or provocative. Venture a critical view about that moment, explaining briefly to your classmates what you find interesting about that moment, and offering up a possible explanation. Then invite your classmates to pitch in with their own views. Don't wait for a moment to jump in. Instead, jump in.

In summary, then: students must be willing and able to:

- read and engage all assigned materials.

- attend all classes and participate in all classes.

- develop questions and arguments that are directly relevant to the materials at hand, and actively to introduce these points into the class discussion on a consistent basis.

- listen and respond thoughtfully to the issues raised in class, engaging the issues in ways that complicate and advance the intellectual life of the seminar.

3. Food

Do not consume meals during class time.

4. E-mail policy and protocols:

It is the policy of the Faculty of Humanities that all email communication sent from students to instructors and T.A.'s and from instructors and T.A.'s to students must use McMaster University email accounts. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. Instructors and T.A.'s will delete emails that do not originate from a McMaster email account.

Note: please ensure that your McMaster e-mail account quota is not full. Messages will not be resent if your quota is full.

All e-mails to your instructor must be written in full sentences (i.e. no point form, no text-messaging short form), and must contain a subject line that includes the course designation, "4AR3." All e-mails must contain some form of salutation and valediction ("Dear Dr. Clark" and "Yours sincerely," respectively, or equivalents). Receipt of all e-mails from me must be acknowledged. For example, a simple "Thank you for getting back to me." will suffice. Be professional, courteous, and respectful in all communications.

I will respond to your e-mail in a timely manner. Do not assume that you will hear back immediately, or at any time of day or night, especially if you send an e-mail outside of regular business hours.

5. Academic Dishonesty:

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty see:

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicIntegrity.pdf>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- i) Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- ii) Improper collaboration in group work.
- iii) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld. See: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity/students/index.html>

6. Statement from the Office of the Associate Dean, Faculty of Humanities, regarding course modifications:

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and instructor websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

7. Copies of Essays and Response Papers:

Keep a copy of the essay and response papers that you submit for the course.

8. Course evaluation:

Students will be invited to evaluate the course on-line towards the conclusion of the term.

9. Cell phones and internet connections:

All cell phones must be turned off and all internet connections must be suspended during

lectures. No surfing, no texting or and no checking for texts or messages in permitted while class is underway. Failure to comply with this instruction will result in you being asked to leave that particular class.

10. McMaster University Grading Scale:

Grade	Equivalent Grade Point	Equivalent Percentages
A+	12	90-100
A	11	85-89
A-	10	80-84
B+	9	77-79
B	8	73-76
B-	7	70-72
C+	6	67-69
C	5	63-66
C-	4	60-62
D+	3	57-59
D	2	53-56
D-	1	50-52
F	0	0-49 -- Failure

¹*AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Criticism*, ed. D. Crimp (Cambridge.: MIT Press, 1988), 3.