

Guest Lecture of the Seminar "LGBTQIA in America"
Department of Anglophone Studies, American Studies, University of Duisburg-Essen
Sunday 7 February 2021, 16-17
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Dysphoria, Euphoria, and the Remediation of Trans Life

Normative models of sex/gender transition say that we must invariably trace its onset to a condition of dysphoria, the distressing incongruence between assigned and desired sex that defines what the DSM-5 termed *gender dysphoria* in 2013. Anti-trans activists have now begun exploiting this diagnosis to spur moral panic around the allegedly epidemic spread of what they would call *rapid onset gender dysphoria*. Nonetheless, alongside this dominating image of transition as an anxiety-laced site of pathogenic damage, new currents of media interest in trans* life have also precipitated in less agonized identifications with and less antagonistic modes of exposure to sex/gender mutability: what some in the United States would call *gender-expansive*, *genderqueer*, *genderfluid*, *gender-variant*. Our question, then, is how the lived experience and proliferating imagery of transition outrun the medical-moral requisitions of dysphoria, or even tip over into its presumed opposite—*euphoria*. Nowhere has the aesthetic currency of this relational potential come into mainstream circulation more overtly than in the HBO show *Euphoria* (2019-present), the centerpiece of this talk's broader interest in an emergent trans mediascape assembled between 2015 (*The Danish Girl*, Caitlyn Jenner on *Vanity Fair*, SOPHIE's *Product*) and 2020 (*Disclosure* on Netflix, trans memes on Instagram, Dorian Electra's *My Agenda*). Listening to and looking through this mediascape leads us to ask, more specifically, how the sensuous effects of drugs and hormones may arouse intimate distortions in the field of sex/gender perception. At points the sonic and visual conventions of euphoria seal those sensuous distortions into an allegorical frame and thereby compel trans bodies to stand in for the therapeutic capacitation of self-made personhood. At those points, I contend, the remediation of euphoria may prove complicit in neoliberal fantasies of the queer subject's happy accession to a progressive timeline of social and political normalization. Yet, as theorists like Marquis Bey, Eva Hayward, and Paul Preciado have suggested, euphoria can also lay open an infinitizing relation to the historical present—a sense of incipient potentiality that allows trans life to stray through alternate realities of somatic experience and inhabit alternative genres of sociopoetic worldmaking. As a critique of the medical-moral criteria that entrap trans life in dramas of endlessly wounded desire for individual correction, then, this talk invites students to think through how the trope and affect of euphoria makes room for experimental forms of embodiment that seek not to line up with but, rather, to overturn the coercive assessment of wellbeing in clinical and public opinion.

M Boulette is a scholar and teacher affiliated with the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Chicago, where they received their PhD in 2020. "Appetite for Ecstasy: Chronic Dispossession and Biochemical Governance in America, 1870-1920," their dissertation, is a study of how appetitive bodies converge around the ecstasies of biochemical alteration amidst the dispossessive conditions that restricted, fractured, and normalized life under industrial settler capitalism. Their current work extends that project toward questions about the performativity of sex, biochemical routes of settler-capitalist administration, pharmaceutical normativity, and the interferences of psychotropic desire.