The Japanese author Mishima has been called “everyone’s favorite homo-fascist.” And, he may be better known in the West for his performative suicide in 1970 by ritual disembowelment than for his writings. But he is well known for his fiction as well—a complex set of narratives that follow an aesthetic that privileges art above life, or reality. In this course we will read a selection of fiction by Mishima, alongside supplementary secondary sources, and screen the films “Patriotism” and “Black Lizard.” We will ask: How and why did his life become so intertwined with his art? What was performative about his life and writings? Why have so many Western critics psychoanalyzed Mishima? What can queer theory bring to an analysis of Mishima’s narratives? We will hope to come away from the course with a better understanding of both Mishima the man and his literature.

On the first day of class students must choose one theme (three suggested below) and follow it through the course. Students will form small groups, and will coordinate a group presentation on the chosen theme(s). Individual semi-formal response papers (3-4 pages) on this same chosen theme(s) in relation to the readings (both primary and secondary) will be handed in on week 3 and week 5. These presentations and response papers will be developed into a final paper due the last day of class (8-10 pages long).

1. the aesthetics of death and art
2. language, representation, “truth”
3. sexuality and performance

Course Requirements:
Attendance and participation 15%
presentations 15%
short papers 20%
Final paper 50%

This class meets once a week for only seven sessions. Any unexcused absence will negatively impact your grade. Late papers will be accepted, but progressively penalized for tardiness.
Statement on Plagiarism
Plagiarism means: presenting as your own someone else’s words, ideas, opinions, and/or argument. You must be sure to cite your sources, include a bibliography, and use quotation marks when you incorporate another person’s words or language verbatim. This includes buying a paper! Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Dean for disciplinary action(s).

Students are required to bring a copy of the assigned readings to class.

Required Books:
For sale at Bluestockings, 172 Allen Street between Stanton and Rivington – (1 block south of Houston and 1st Avenue). Buy these in the beginning of the class, the bookstore sends back unsold copies by around midterm. Also on reserve at Bobst Library.


Supplementary text:

Required Articles and Chapters on Blackboard


**** On Japanese names: Japanese names are in the opposite order of American ones, so the FAMILY NAME (our last name) comes first, and the GIVEN NAME is second. (Like in a bibliographic list, but without a comma: i.e. Cornyetz Nina).

Schedule

January 24, Week One, introduction
In class film, Schrader’s “Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters”

January 31, Week Two: Confession and the shishôsetsu
Short lecture: intro to shishôsetsu genre.

February 7, Week Three: Sexuality and Performance
Short lecture: epistemology of the closet
Readings: Foucault, History of Sexuality.
Response Paper Due

February 14, Week Four: The Aesthetics of Death
In class film, “Patriotism”
Short lecture: The death drive.
Readings: Mishima, Patriotism, Start reading Mishima, The Temple of the Golden Pavilion

February 21, Week Five: Art, Imagination, Reality
Short lecture: Deleuze, sadism and masochism.
Readings: Finish Mishima, The Temple of the Golden Pavilion; Finish Miyoshi, “Mute’s Rage,” 159-180 (blackboard);
Response Paper Due

February 28, Week Six: Mishima and the “autofictional machine”
In class film: “Black Lizard”
Short lecture: on narratology and “doublings”

March 6, Week Seven: Wrapping it up
Readings: Vincent, “Yukio Mishima: Everybody’s Favorite Homofascist,” and “Out of the Closet” typescript, (blackboard)
Final paper due.