***The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson* (2017) and *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* (2018)**

**Film backgrounds/summaries:** The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson is a 2017 documentary, directed by David France, who is a cisgender white gay filmmaker and journalist. It is France's second documentary; he also directed *How To Survive a Plague* (2012), which focuses on HIV/AIDS and the ACT UP movement in New York City in the 1980s and 1990s. *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson* chronicles the story of Marsha P. Johnson, a Black trans woman who was a prominent figure in the Stonewall rebellion, co-founded the group Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries in the 1970s with Sylvia Rivera, and was an LGBTQ advocate until her death in 1992. The film follows Victoria Cruz, an anti-violence advocate, as she investigates the circumstances of Johnson's death.

*Happy Birthday, Marsha* is a 2018 short film created by Black trans artist Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel. It features Mya Taylor as Marsha P. Johnson and Eve Lindley as Sylvia Rivera, and imagines the day and evening before the Stonewall riots began from Marsha P. Johnson's perspective.

**Content warning:** *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson* contains brief nudity and discussions of violence, murder, sex work, and suicide. *Happy Birthday, Marsha* contains police harassment and implied police brutality.

**Running time:** *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson* is 1 hour and 45 minutes. *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* is 15 minutes.

**Notes:**

* This week, we will be watching these two films together to address the ethics of storytelling and the different approaches of these two films to portraying Marsha P. Johnson. Students should watch *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson* prior to Day 1's class, and *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* prior to day 2's class along with the assigned reading for that day. For more on the controversy in the making of these two films, you may want to read (and perhaps assign) this essay by Tourmaline in [Teen Vogue](Teen%20Vogue) or this article in [Slate](https://slate.com/human-interest/2017/10/marsha-p-johnson-netflix-doc-raises-questions-over-what-trans-led-storytelling-would-look-like.html).
* Because there are two films this week, I have reserved 15 minutes in Day 3’s class for a student-led scene analysis of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* (in addition to the typical time reserved on Day 1). You could alternatively use this time for more teacher-led scene analysis or to examine the Slate or Teen Vogue articles mentioned above.

**Materials for this week:**

* Lesson plans
* Screening quiz
* Secondary texts:
  + Day 2: Caldafell, Maria Bernadette. "Narrative Authority, Theory in the Flesh, and the Fight over *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson." QED: A Journal in GLBTQ* Worldmaking Vol. 6, no. 2, 2019, pp. 26-39
  + Day 3: Tang, Jeannine. "Contemporary Art and Critical Transgender Infrastructures." *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility,* edited by Tourmaline, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2017, pp. 363-393. (Excerpt provided: 378-383).

**Lesson 1 – Close Reading *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson***

1. (7 min) Screening quiz.
2. (5 min) Share out.
3. (15 min) Student-led scene analysis on *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson*.
4. (3 min) Start teacher-led scene analysis with screening clip. (Closing scene - 1:34:48-1:37:30)

**Lesson 2: Examining *The Life and Death of Marsha P. Johnson* Alongside *Happy Birthday, Marsha!***

1. (5 min) Personal reflection. Choose one question to respond to:
2. What did you know, prior to watching these films, about Stonewall, Marsha P. Johnson, or Sylvia Rivera?
3. What did you not know? What surprised you?
4. What would you like to know more about?
5. (5 min) Discuss.

**Lesson 3: Examining *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* Alongside “Contemporary Art and Critical Transgender Infrastructures”**

1. (5 min) Students write – compare/contrast. Choose one question to respond to. Consider our discussion yesterday and the two films you’ve seen.
2. Which film do you think you’ll remember more? Why?
3. Which film moved you more? Why?
4. Which film do you think best honored the legacy of Marsha P. Johnson? Why?
5. (7 min) Discuss.
6. (15 min) Student-led scene analysis on *Happy Birthday, Marsha!*
7. (3 min) Teacher-led analysis begins. Screen today’s clip from *Happy Birthday, Marsha!*
8. (5 min) Discussion prep.
9. What does Tang argue in her piece?
10. How does the scene we just reviewed, or other scenes in the film, relate to her argument?