

**Application for the  
2009 NEH Summer Seminar  
for Faculty**

**Queer Theory Now and Then:  
Debates in Gender and  
Sexuality**

**June 15-July 10, 2009**

**SUNY Potsdam**

**Seminar Leader:**

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**Professor of English and Gender Studies**

**University of Southern California**

# NEH Seminar

## Queer Theory Now and Then

Judith Halberstam  
USC

### OVERVIEW:

In this seminar, we will survey the fields of queer theory, sexuality and gender studies and gay and lesbian studies. Starting with some key texts by Foucault, Freud, Rubin and others, we will work through the main markers in queer theory in the 1980's and 1990's. In more recent years, we can identify a major paradigm shift in the field of queer studies and we have seen the emergence of a body of queer scholarship that situates the study of sexuality at the intersection of questions of race, nationalism, globalization and militarism. This new framing of queer studies powerfully challenges the white normativity of some earlier strands of sexuality studies, and the implicit heteronormativity of some strands of U.S. ethnic studies and postcolonial studies. This course will explore this new paradigm of queer studies as well as the earlier work in psychoanalytic and post structuralist queer theory. In other words, we will trace the critical genealogies of this recent scholarship through the works of Foucault, Freud, Rubin, Derrida and others. The course will be organized around particular "keywords" (to borrow from Raymond Williams) that have gained cross-disciplinary salience in queer studies. Seminar participants are encouraged to develop critical genealogies of their own "keywords."

### Organization of the seminar:

#### Session One:

#### "Psychoanalysis and Queer Perversions"

The seminar will begin with readings by Freud and Lacan about sex, desire, subjectivity and the body. We will supplement the Freud and Lacan with essays by later commentators who contest certain elements of the psychoanalytic scene but maintain a strong connection to psychoanalytic theory.

#### Readings:

Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes" in *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, ed. Rachel Adams and David Savran (New York: Wiley Press, 2002), 14-20.

Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality* (1982) with essay by Jacqueline Rose from the same collection.

David Eng, "Introduction," *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

## **Session Two:**

### **“Thinking Sex”**

In this session, we will read Gayle Rubin’s classic essays, “Traffic in Women” and “Thinking Sex” along with Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*. These readings contest the psychoanalytic model and insist upon a discussion of the modality of modern power and its relation to sexuality.

#### **Readings:**

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980).

Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality” in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carol Vance (Boston: Routledge, 1984), 267- 319.

Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women” from Linda Nicholson, ed. *The Second Wave Reader: A Reader in Feminist Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

## **Session Three:**

### **“Queer Kinship”**

Gayle Rubin’s essay, “The Traffic in Women,” draws upon Freud, Levi Strauss and Lacan to think about the way kinship institutes the laws of compulsory heterosexuality and certain forms of the nuclear family. We will build on her essay and on Foucault’s theories of discursive power to think through the issues of kinship and sexuality.

#### **Readings:**

Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000).

Sigmund Freud, “The Horror of Incest,” *Totem and Taboo* (NY: Norton, 1950): 1-17.

David Eng, “Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas,” *Social Text* 76, 21:3 (Fall 2003).

Esther Newton, “My Best Informat’s Dress” in *Out in the Field: Reflections of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists*, eds. Lewin and Leap (Urbana and Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1996): 212-235.

Kath Weston, "Forever Is a Long Time: Romancing the Real in Gay Kinship Ideologies" in *longslowburn: sexuality and social science* (NY: Routledge, 1998): 57-82.

## **Session Four:**

### **"Queer Space"**

The topic of time and temporality has been important to queer theory because normativity exerts itself in terms of the uses and conceptualizations of time and space. Most of the work on postmodern space assumes that the proper frameworks for considering transformations in the meaning of space, place and geography have to do with labor and political economy. Sexuality, within these discussions, is usually relegated to the domain of the "private" or the "identitarian"; little consideration, if any, tends to be given to the ways in which sexuality, pleasure, desire and sexual practices are integral to the new definitions of culture and political protest within postmodernity.

#### **Readings:**

Gayatri Gopinath, "Introduction" and "Chapter One" from *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005).

Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" in *Diacritics*, vol 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 22- 27.

Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: NYU Press, 1999)

## **Session Five:**

### **Queer Temporalities**

Time has become a very hot topic in queer theory in recent years and much of the new work responds to or has been influenced by Lee Edelman's book. We will read Edelman alongside other work on time, temporality and queer flows.

#### **Readings:**

Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005).

Elizabeth Freeman, "Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations," *New Literary History* 31, no.4 (2000): 1-18.

Rod Ferguson, "Introduction: Queer of Color Critique," *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis, MN, 2004): 1-30.

## **Session Six:**

### **“Queer Transivities”**

The relationship between gender variance and (homo) sexuality has been debated vigorously over the last century. Early twentieth century sexology saw gender variance as a kind of symptom of homosexuality. But by the 1960's, transgenderism had shifted out of the domain of homosexuality and into a category all its own: transsexuality. We will follow this shift and its repercussions.

#### **Readings:**

Various readings from *Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (NY and London: Routledge, 2006). Including early sexology and:

Dean Spade, “Mutilating Gender” from the *Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (NY and London: Routledge, 2006).

Jay Prosser, “Judith Butler, Queer Feminism, Transgender and the Substantiation of Sex” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*.

## **Session Seven:**

### **“Queer Utopia/Dystopia”**

While one trajectory in queer theory, perhaps exemplified by the work of Jose E. Munoz, Elizabeth Freeman and Roderick Ferguson, has claimed queer as an ecstatic alternative to grim, oedipal reproductions of the temporal same, another strand, most boldly articulated in recent years by Heather Love and Lee Edelman, has critiqued the very notion of the utopian and has cast it as grounded in heteronormative investments in reproductive futurity. One special issue on queer studies published by *Social Text* has claimed the place of the dynamic present and announces itself as “Queer Studies Now.” Another special issue in SAQ (forthcoming) announces itself to be “After Sex.” What are we to make of these various positions on queerness, time, futurity, ideality, happiness, melancholia, futility, euphoria?

#### **Readings:**

Jose Munoz, “Ghosts of Public Sex: Utopian Longings, Queer Memories” in *Policing Public Sex*, ed. Dangerous Bedfellows (Boston: South End Press, 1996): 355-372.

Heather Love, “Spoiled Identity,” in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007).

Eve Sedgwick, "Paranoid and Reparative Readings" in *Touching/Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003).

Jasbir Puar, "Introduction," *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2007).

## **Session Eight:**

### **"Queer Studies Now"**

#### **Readings:**

Selections from "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" Special Issue of *Social Text*, co-edited by David Eng, Judith Halberstam and Jose Munoz (Vol. 84- 85 Fall/Winter 2005).

# **APPLICATION**

## **SUNY Potsdam NEH Faculty Development Program Summer Seminar for Faculty**

Our summer seminar is offered for faculty of SUNY Potsdam and for the faculties of the Associated Colleges of the St. Lawrence Valley. The seminars provide college teachers with opportunities to enrich their knowledge of the subjects that they teach and study by working with distinguished scholars, by studying with other teachers and scholars, and by undertaking individual projects of their own design.

There are up to eight participants selected for each seminar. Through research, reflection, and discussion with the seminar director and with colleagues in a seminar atmosphere, participants have an opportunity to deepen their understanding of their field and improve their ability to convey that understanding to others. Participants are expected to take part fully in the work of the seminar and to complete all seminar projects.

Although writing may be encouraged by seminar directors, lengthy papers typical of graduate courses are not required. Seminar topics are broad enough to accommodate a wide range of interests. The topics allow participants to address significant questions, explore major texts, and extend their thinking beyond disciplinary concerns.

### *Individual Projects*

In addition to the common work of the seminar, participants pursue individual study of their own choosing. Prospective applicants will receive detailed information about the seminar before applying. Particular seminars will vary in their research emphases, some focusing more on individual reading or research projects, others concentrating more on the common work of the seminar. The work to be undertaken beyond the common agenda of the seminar may be a research project or a curriculum project.

### *Eligibility*

To be eligible applicants must be members of the faculty of SUNY Potsdam or faculty of one of the Associated Colleges. Faculty who have participated in previous SUNY Potsdam NEH Seminars are eligible to apply, but preference will be given to those who have not previously participated.

### *Selection Criteria*

The selection committee will review applications and select participants on the basis of (1) applicant's qualifications to do the work of the seminar and make a

contribution to it; (2) the conception and organization of the applicant's proposed study project in relation to the seminar topic; (3) the potential value of that project to other members of the seminar.

### *Stipend and Conditions of Award*

Individuals selected to participate in the four-week seminar will receive a stipend of \$2500 and an allowance of up to \$500 for purchase of library books and travel related to the seminar project.

Participants are required to attend all seminar sessions and to engage fully in the work of the seminar. During the tenure of the seminar they may not undertake other professional duties which will interfere with their participation in the seminar (in particular, they may not be teaching Summer School in tandem with participating in the seminar).

Immediately following the completion of the seminar, participants will be asked to submit an evaluation. In addition, ten months following the seminar, participants will provide an evaluation of the impact the seminar had on their profession development with particulars about papers given, scholarship published, and curricula projects implemented as a result of participation in the seminar.

## **APPLICATION MATERIALS**

### **1. Application Cover Sheet**

Applicant's Title and Name  
Home Address  
Work Address  
Telephones, Home and Work  
Major Field of Applicant

### **2. Description of Objectives**

Applicants must write an essay describing their objectives in applying to the seminar. **Close attention should be given to the preparation of the description of objectives because the description will be considered carefully by the committee as they make their selections.** This essay should include any relevant personal and academic information. The essay should address reasons for applying to the seminar; the applicant's interest, both academic and personal, in the subject of the seminar, qualifications to do the work of the seminar and to make a contribution to it; what the applicant wants to accomplish in the seminar; and the relation of the seminar to the applicant's professional responsibilities. The descriptive material provided about the seminar should be read carefully because the committee may request that particular information be given in the description of objectives.

The application essay should be **NO MORE THAN** three to four double-spaced pages. Be sure to address the following questions in relation to the proposed project:

- a. The specific study, research, or curricular project, including the basic ideas, problems, and questions that are of interest, with a specific concrete plan of investigation and a statement of its rationale.
- b. If the proposed project is part of a long-term undertaking, the present state of the larger undertaking and how the summer project fits in.
- c. The relation of the study to the applicant's immediate and long-range objectives as a teacher and scholar.
- d. Other information relevant to the proposed project.

### **3. Professional History**

An application **must** include the professional history form. A C.V. may be attached but will not be accepted in lieu of the professional history.



**10. Courses Taught during the last two years**

**11. Academic Awards and Grants (mention any special awards or professional distinctions)**

**12. Previous SUNY Potsdam NEH Seminars**

**13. *Most significant* Publications and Professional Activities (This list should be selective and not all inclusive.)**