

STUDENT FELLOWS AT THE CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES

FALL 2007

The Center for the Humanities invites applications from students in their junior year interested in participating as Student Fellows in the Fall 2007 Faculty Seminar directed by four Distinguished Visiting Professors in the Humanities. Up to five students will be selected as Fellows to join a working group of faculty and the visiting professors that will meet weekly to discuss selected readings on the seminar theme "Thinking Interdisciplinarity." The seminar will meet Wednesdays from 4:15-6:00 p.m. Student Fellows will also be invited to a weekly lunch of seminar participants on Fridays.

Seminar Theme: "Thinking Interdisciplinarity"

Sept. 3-Sept. 21 -- Robert J. Richards: "Evolutionary Theory and the Establishment of Modern Thought." More individuals learned of evolutionary theory through the voluminous writings of Ernst Haeckel, Darwin's German disciple, than through those of Darwin himself. In his popular works, he made famous the concept of the missing link and the principle that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. In Haeckel's rendition, evolutionary theory was at the leading edge of modern thought. That thought had rejected religious superstition and sought a new political dispensation based on advancing science. Haeckel, I believe, is largely responsible for the warfare between science and religion that broke out in the last part of the nineteenth century and continues to the present day. A polemicist of the first order, he was accused of fraud by both his scientific and religious enemies. His own thought took its polemical character from his tragic relationship with two women, and his evolutionary theory bears their stamp. Our discussions will involve the question of how the historian makes moral judgments about historical figures. The discussion will be based on the final chapters of my forthcoming book *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Battle over Evolutionary Thought*.

Oct 1-Oct 19 -- Lawrence Grossberg: "Relocating Modernity." In my last book, *Caught in the Crossfire: Kids, Politics and America's Future*, I concluded that the struggles that have defined and transformed US political culture over the past 30 years might be fruitfully understood as a struggle over competing ways of being modern in the US. Naturally then, one has to consider, in a less fraught mode, the question of modernity and the possibility of a multiplicity of ways of being modern. I suppose we might start off the discussion by considering some of the different questions encompassed under the issue of modernity, and some of the different ways modernity has been defined and conceptualized. We might then turn to some of the different ways that people have tried to open up the category and allow for its multiplicity, as well as looking at some of the ways the concept is used by intellectuals from/about non-western regions of the world. Although most seem to locate the origins of modernity in the West (actually Northern Europe), I want to suggest the possibility of multiple origins (perhaps by considering the modernity of Levantine society). And yet, underlying all of this discussion is the unavoidable issue of the ontology of modernity—of what constitutes a modern way of being in the world. (I have lots of possible readings but welcome other suggestions.) We might also consider the implications of such a reconsideration for questions of political economy, state politics, globalization and cultural studies. That is a lot and we obviously won't do it all, but it gives you an idea of the intellectual and discursive space-times I want to wander through.

Oct 29-Nov. 16 -- Professor Lennard Davis: "Obsession." I'm interested in answering the question: can a disease have a biography. In essence, what I'm asking is how something like OCD became a disease. In doing so, I have to trace how obsession itself became an obsession to our culture. This means looking at a range of issues from the 16th to the 21st centuries, and looking at these issues through the development of neurology, psychiatry, philosophy, religion, law, literature and culture--as these all interplay with each other in developing a culture of obsession, a part of that culture that studies obsession, and another overlapping part that is obsessed.

Nov. 26-Dec. 14 -- Professor M. Jacqui Alexander: "Transnational Feminism and Sexuality Studies." The purpose of this module is to expose faculty to some of the major analytic, methodological and political insights that are produced when transnational feminism and sexuality studies are brought into productive tension. Using the ideological practices of different state formations as our empirical point of reference, we will trace how (hetero)sexuality comes to be knitted into the modus operandi of the state; examine the most useful elements of a comparative transnational feminist methodology that can assist us in understanding these formations in relational rather than relativist terms; and more generally engage the new interdisciplinary questions that are generated at the intersection of these two fields.

Eligibility:

Students interested in becoming Student Fellows at the Center for the Humanities can have majors in any department. All applicants must have an overall GPA of 3.5 or higher and must be able to attend the weekly meetings. Students will not receive credit for their participation and no formal writing assignments will be required. Students will be encouraged to think about how their work during the semester might be developed into a MAP during the Spring semester.

Application Procedure:

To apply to be a Student Fellow at the Center for the Humanities, interested junior students should submit the following:

- ◆ A statement of their interest in the topic of the Seminar (no more than 750 words)
- ◆ A transcript of their coursework at Grinnell
- ◆ Names of two faculty references

Deadline for Applications: Applications must be turned in by Friday, April 13, 2007 at 5 PM to Sondi Burnell, Goodnow 107. Selected students will be notified before pre-registration.

Review Committee: The Center for the Humanities Advisory Board will review the applications. Further information about the Center and the four Distinguished Professors can be found at: <http://web.grinnell.edu/CentHumanities/index.html>