

# Center for the Humanities

## FALL 2007 Faculty Seminar:

### "Thinking Interdisciplinarity"

"What we discovered was that serious interdisciplinary work does not mean that one puts up the interdisciplinary flag and then has a kind of coalition of colleagues from different departments, each of whom brings his or her own specialization to a kind of academic smorgasbord from which students can sample each of these riches in turn . . . . It was never a question of which disciplines would contribute to the development of this field, but of how one could decenter or destabilize a series of interdisciplinary fields. We had to respect and engage with the paradigms and traditions of knowledge and of empirical and concrete work in each of these disciplinary areas in order to construct what we called cultural studies."

Stuart Hall, "The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities"

The Center for the Humanities invites applications from faculty interested in participating in the Fall 2007 Faculty Seminar directed by four Distinguished Visiting Professors in the Humanities. Up to twelve faculty members will be selected as Fellows to meet weekly to discuss selected readings on the seminar theme "Thinking Interdisciplinarity." The seminar will meet Wednesdays from 4:15-6:00 p.m. A weekly lunch meeting will also be scheduled on Fridays. While priority will be given to faculty members interested in participating in the entire semester's activities, faculty interested in participating in one or more of the three-week seminars of individual visitors are also encouraged to apply.

The four Distinguished Professors will be:

**Robert J. Richards** is the Morris Fishbein Professor of the History of Science and Medicine at the University of Chicago. He is a Professor in the Departments of History, Philosophy, Psychology, and in the Committee on the Conceptual and Historical Studies of Science, and Director of the Fishbein Center for the History of Science and Medicine. He received a Ph.D. from St. Louis University in 1971, and another from the University of Chicago in 1978. Professor Richards' research interests lie in the history and philosophy of psychology and biology, with specific interests in evolutionary biopsychology, ethology, and sociobiology, as well as in theories of perception from the ancient period to the present day. His most recent book is *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought*, and will be published with the University of Chicago Press in 2007. Other books include: *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (2002), and *The Meaning of Evolution: The Morphological Construction and Ideological Reconstruction of Darwin's Theory* (1992).

**Lawrence Grossberg** is the Morris Davis Distinguished Professor of Communication Studies and Cultural Studies and Chair of the Executive Committee of the University Program in Cultural Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has been international co-editor of the journal *Cultural Studies* for the past decade. His research interests are popular music and youth culture, the philosophy and theory of culture and communication, and postmodernism. He has published over one hundred articles and essays, and his work has been translated into ten languages. His most recent book is *Caught In The Crossfire: Kids, Politics, And America's Future* (2005). Other books include: *It's a Sin: Essays on Postmodernism, Politics and Culture* (1988), *We Gotta Get Out Of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (1992), and *Dancing in Spite of Myself: Essays in Popular Culture* (1997).

**Lennard Davis** is Professor of English at the University of Illinois-Chicago. He is a leading figure in the field of disability studies. His book *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* gives a political and social history to the idea of Normality. *Bending over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions* is a collection of essays that cover the relation of disability to contemporary and historical culture and politics. Davis has also has written on the history and theory of the novel. His work *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* presents a Foucauldian reading of the novel as a discourse emerging from the matrix of journalism, history, and the law. *Resisting Novels: Fiction and Ideology* continues that work by describing the formal and constitutive ways in which novels are inherently ideological structures defending and resisting bourgeois capitalism.

**M. Jacqui Alexander** is Professor of Women's Studies and Gender Studies at the University of Toronto, and holds a Ph.D. from Tufts University. She is one of the most important theorists of transnational feminism today and her work has had a profound impact on feminist, queer, and critical race theories. Her research and teaching have focused on questions of colonialism, political economy, and the racialized and heteronormative regulatory practices of the modern state as well as spiritual dimensions of experience and the meaning of sacred subjectivity. Her most recent book is *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred* (2005). Other books include: *Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray!: Feminist Visions for a Just World* (2002), and *The Third Wave: Feminist Perspectives on Racism* (1998).

Each of the four Distinguished Professors will be on campus for three weeks, during which time they will direct a faculty seminar. A brief description follows:

**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.

#### **Application Procedure:**

The Center seeks participants from a broad range of disciplines and from all the divisions. To apply faculty are asked to submit a 1-2 paragraph description of their interest in the seminar topic.

#### **Deadline for Applications:**

Applications should be turned in by Friday, April 13, 2007 to Alan Schrift, Director of the Center for the Humanities.

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