

Approaching Literary and Cultural Theory

with a Special Session on Age and its Metaphors · HU Berlin · November 11-13, 2010

Call for Papers: 9th Annual Students and Graduate Conference

Work in the fields of literary and cultural studies is guided by meanwhile well-known and oft-cited theoretical assumptions: Language is socially constructed, realities and subjectivities are constructed in and by language, subjects construct themselves and their worlds by their everyday use of language, and power relations are constructed and deconstructed through these processes that (young) academics are supposed to disentangle and interpret. Once these tenets are translated into concrete research practice beyond textbook complexity and into questions of research design and methodology, Kant's truism of what "may be right in theory, [...] won't work in practice" summarizes the challenges of fitting theory to practice and vice versa.

Engaging with the theory-practice-complex, we are confronted with (1) the question of how theory and the everyday research and writing practice in the field of literary and cultural studies relate toward each other, and (2) what theories can be used – nowadays when 'everything is possible' and a seemingly uncountable number of theories is available.

In order to exemplify the complex of theory, methodology and its applications in research texts, the conference will, as a special focus, also be dedicated to age studies. The topic of age, like the aged themselves, is oftentimes invisible, or rather, pushed to the margin. Age is fought against, its implications are denied and euphemized, it is treated like an affliction that may be cured with cosmetic surgery, severe changes in lifestyle, and positive attitude. "You are only as old as you feel," "enjoy your golden years," and "retire," meaning, withdraw from being a productive member of a community that focuses on different groups of consumers.

Of the various approaches to the topic of aging, geriatrics concentrates on the medical, gerontology on sociological aspects. A humanistic gerontology, or age studies, aims to question the validity and cultural power of cultural constructions of age, and interrogates cultural imaginings of age and aging in literature and cul-



ture. This involves conceptions of the life course, which may vary from culture to culture, and the very constitution of society as an inter-generational community.

In light of the questions about theory, research practice and age, we would like to invite speakers (students and graduate students, but also professionals in the fields) to present papers or illustrate examples of their past/ongoing research and thereby enter in a dialogue about:

- concepts of theory and their applicability in literary and cultural studies
- the economics of theories and methodologies
- criteria for choosing theory/suitability of theory to research context
- unavailable theories and adaptations of theory
- methodologies of critique
- intersections between contemporary discourses and theories (interdisciplinarity, intertextuality, contradictions, complements...)
- age studies
- or anything worthwhile contributing to the discussion of the issue at stake

Please submit your abstracts for a 20-minute presentation till August 31, 2010.

A current list of topics already covered, the preliminary program as well as further information can be found on the conference web site:

www2.hu-berlin.de/amerika/asc/theory2010

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This conference is sponsored and supported by the American Studies Program



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